God's Gateway

Identity and Meaning in a Hindu Pilgrimage Place



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To Rachel, my love.
To Fiona, Vera, and Gavin, who each made our lives complete.
To Beth, a loving sister.

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Acknowledgments

Twenty years ago, Rachel and I set off to live in Hardwar so that I could do research for a dissertation. At that time, I could imagine my future only in the most general way, but looking backward inspires a sense of gratitude for the blessings I have received, and for those who have helped me in so many ways.

I thank my teachers—Jerry Balmuth and John Carter at Colgate; David Eckel at Harvard; Rich Salomon, Mike Shapiro, and Collett Cox at Washington; and Jack Hawley at Columbia. Each of them taught me vital things, and each has been a model in my own efforts to become an inspiring teacher and a careful scholar.

I thank my past and current students, especially those who have come with me to India, starting with the "Black Lung Tour" in January 1999. Since "teaching is learning," as Rich Salomon once told me, teaching them has taught me. Even better, some have become and remain my friends long after their graduations.

I thank my colleagues and friends, both at Carthage and in "the business." They have formed the community that has made life a joy. I especially thank our friends in Hardwar—the Pandeys, the Jaitleys, the Badaonis, and the Budhkars—who have been welcoming and helpful throughout. This is, after all, what friends do for each other.

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A Note on Transliteration

Years of teaching undergraduates have led me to take a minimalist attitude toward transliteration, and especially toward diacritical marks. In this sort of a book, diacritical marks are unnecessary for the scholarly readers—who already know what these words mean—and confusing to the general readers, who are unaware of what they mean. Consequently, I have omitted these entirely. I have treated all Indian place names (e.g., Hardwar, Rishikesh), all historical figures (e.g., Sharvan Nath), and all Hindu gods, goddesses, and mythological figures (e.g., Vishnu, Bhagirath) as if they were English words and have written them as such; the only consistent modification has been to substitute "sh" for both the palatal and retroflex sibilants.

Some Sanskrit and Hindi words appear in the text, either because they are important terms (e.g., *sanyasi*) or because they indicate an original phrase I was translating. Unlike the names, I have not capitalized these words, and I have italicized them to flag them as foreign-language terms. To help an English-reading public pronounce them correctly, here, too, I have rendered the palatal and retroflex sibilants as "sh" (e.g., *shaligram*, *nakshatra*). For greater intelligibility in English sentences, I have often used the English plural marker "s" in lieu of the Sanskrit or Hindi plural forms (e.g., *ghat*s, *darshan*s).

A final problem comes from the differing Sanskrit and Hindi forms of the same word (e.g., *dana/dan*), and each has contexts where it seems more appropriate—Sanskrit when discussing Sanskrit texts, Hindi when reporting a Hindi speaker's remark. I have tried to be consistent, but in such circumstances, some arbitrary elements seem inevitable.

List of Abbreviations

A.	*Agni Purana*
AIN.	*Ain-i-Akbari*
Bd.	*Brahmanda Purana*
Br.	*Brahma Purana*
Bhag.	*Bhagavata Purana*
Bvv	*Brahmavaivarta Purana*
DBhag.	*Devibhagavata Purana*
G.	*Garuda Purana*
GAD	General Administration Department (Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow)
Har.	*Harivamsha*
HDM	*Haridvaramahatmya*
HMI	Home Ministry of India, National Archives (New Delhi)
HOD	P. V. Kane's *History of Dharmashastra*
IGI	*Imperial Gazetteer of India*
K.	*Kurma Purana*
KK.	*Kedarakhand*
L.	*Linga Purana*
M.	*Matsya Purana*
MHB	*Mahabharata*
MPM	*Mayapurimahatmya*
Nar.	*Naradiya Purana*
NWPCJP	*North-West Provinces Criminal (Judicial) Proceedings*
P.	*Padma Purana*

Ram.	*Valmiki Ramayana*
S.	*Shiva Purana*
SDG	*Saharanpur District Gazetteer*
SGTPN	*Shri Ganga Tirtha Parva Nirnaya (Ganga Sabha pamphlet/ almanac)*
Sk.	*Skanda Purana*
V.	*Vayu Purana*
Vam.	*Vamana Purana*
Var.	*Varaha Purana*
VDS	*Vishnu Dharmasutra*
Vi.	*Vishnu Purana*
VS	*Vishnu Smrti*

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I

Finding a Sense of Place

I owe a great deal to my friend Karl, who along with my new bride, Rachel, made up my primary social circle in 1985–86, when he and I were studying Hindi at the American Institute of Indian Studies in New Delhi. In April 1986, he persuaded me to travel to Hardwar to see the Kumbha Mela, and in May he introduced me to Baba Amarnath, who became a friend, adviser, and surrogate grandfather during my PhD research in 1989–90. The Kumbha Mela astonished me—partly for its magnificent spectacle and incredible vibrancy, but also because Hardwar was easily the cleanest place I had ever seen in India. The dirt had begun creeping back when I went there again in May—on my way up to and down from the Himalayas—but even though the Kumbh's bloom was slowly fading, Hardwar struck me as a good place.

Years before entering a PhD program, I was already thinking about doing research on pilgrimage—both because it interested me and because I wanted to look at living religious practice. Given India's long history of pilgrimage, any look at current practice would need to consider its relationship with established tradition, and talking intelligibly about pilgrimage would require investigating and understanding both dimensions. I also had purely personal factors in play—if I could arrange to live for a while in another culture, there was no way I would write a "library" dissertation, and since being married involves considering a spouse's welfare, I needed to find a place where Rachel could find something to do.

I returned to Hardwar in October 1989 and lived there for almost a year. Since 1990, I've gone back twelve times—sometimes longer, sometimes shorter; sometimes with family, sometimes alone—and have not only observed Hardwar's changes in that time but also gradually widened my circle of friends and acquaintances and grown more deeply embedded there. Some friends have had children after long waiting, others have married off their children, or have had their parents die, or have died themselves—all the normal milestones in any human life. My initial fieldwork provided the data for a dissertation, but I couldn't have written this book in 1990—partly because some of the things hadn't happened at that time, but even more because I didn't have the perspective that time and helpful friends can provide.

In her introduction to *Connected Places*, Anne Feldhaus talks about the difference between "space" and "place." Space is "abstract, homogenous, unmarked, and neutral," whereas place is "concrete, particular and differentiated" (2003: 5). She goes on to describe some qualities connected with place, and different ways that different groups have constructed it—which connects to her larger project of tying together "Religion, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination" (the book's subtitle) in Maharashtra. For me, that sentence contrasting space and place was an epiphany that helped to articulate notions around which I had been circling for a long time. The key is that the notion of any place is an *idea*—consciously and deliberately constructed, propagated, ascribed to, and imposed on the physical landscape (rivers, hills, etc.) of a space. This is the difference between the Ganges and the Ganga—the former is a moving body of water, often filled with contaminants and pollution, the latter a purifying goddess and an object of worship. As with any other important idea—holiness, evil, beauty, propriety, and so forth—this idea is not inherent in the things themselves, but ascribed by people's agency and reinforced by culture and behavioral patterns.

Religious practice around the world stresses the importance of place—moving from undifferentiated space to significant space. Place is intimately connected with notions of identity—another constructed idea—both for individuals (where is your home?) and for groups. Among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, divine revelation and group history are associated with concrete places and render these places holy to the faithful. Any study set in Jerusalem, Rome, or Mecca—or Crown Heights, Canterbury, or Karbala—will not only intersect many people's concerns but also reveal truths about how these people understand themselves.[1] The same is true for Hindus in India and throughout the world. Just as Hindus consider certain parts of the body purer than others, and certain times more auspicious than others—both clear examples of how ideas construct "reality"—so, too, certain places are seen as charged with greater

power than others. Scattered throughout India are thousands of *tirtha*s, a word that literally means a "ford" or a "crossing-place." Just as a ford is a good place to cross a river, so these metaphorical fords are gateways or passages through which humans can cross over to make contact with some deeper reality. In many cases, such places are believed to have some resident power (e.g., a presiding deity) or to be more efficacious channels for transmitting such power, but in either case, this power is deemed more readily accessible in those places than in others.

These *tirtha*s run the spectrum from local shrines to pilgrim sites with an international clientele; their sheer numbers and the absence of a single holiest center reflect the decentralized character of Hindu religious life. Some observers have proposed various schemes to rank them—local, regional, all-India, and so forth—but many factors make this endeavor problematic.[2] India's regional diversity and sectarian biases virtually ensure that any ranking will be either arbitrary or local—that is, reflecting either the opinions of the compiler or the bias of the sample. An objective and reliable holiness index, unfortunately, has yet to be developed.

Despite obstacles to precise ratings, some places are clearly more important than others because Hindus themselves deem certain places particularly holy. Focusing on one or another of these places will reveal things not only about that place but also about the society. Focusing on a particular *tirtha* can also be a lens to examine more general concerns, because its change and development can reveal the forces in the larger society. Any study doing so must necessarily begin with the particular. As Clifford Geertz notes in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, "the anthropologist characteristically approaches such broader interpretations and more abstract analyses from the direction of exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters."[3] For historians of religion as well as anthropologists, such grounding in the particular is the essential foundation for wider expansion, since without this foundation one has nothing on which to build.

So this book is the story of a place, the city of Hardwar. To be more exact, it is a collection of stories—if one accepts the claim that ideas of place are *ascribed*, then there can clearly be no single "story." People in centuries past have constructed images of Hardwar—as shown in the *mahatmya* ("greatness") literature, a literary genre aiming to emphasize the holiness of a site, and by the mythic and historical narratives seeking to describe its importance. Local interest groups—*panda*s, ascetics, and businesspeople—continue to construct and reinforce images of Hardwar because these images intersect their economic and religious concerns. My insistence on multiple narratives comes from the conviction that any one of these sources is incomplete—that each can reveal

something the others do not and more fully show the complex contours of the whole.

This commitment to honoring and evaluating multiple perspectives has been one of my fundamental methodological assumptions. It seems obvious that any perspective on a place will be influenced by the sources one uses and by the way one uses them. Yet until quite recently, the great divide in the study of Hindu religion has been between scholars who have privileged textual sources (such as Indologists and historians of religion) and scholars who have relied on field study (social scientists). This divide has eroded in the recent past—and it was never absolute—but these tendencies to privilege certain types of sources still remain.

In this book, I have sought to balance textual and field sources to provide as complete and nuanced a picture as possible. Fieldwork reveals things about modern Hardwar and contemporary Hindu religious life and provides examples against which to examine the texts, whereas textual sources provide an essential context for interpreting field data. Each is a legitimate method to find out about a place and its people, but both are necessary for a complete picture—just as one eye can provide bare vision, but two are needed for depth perception. Neither type of source can be uncritically privileged; it is essential to examine their context and understand them in light of that context. For example, one ubiquitous textual source for *tirtha*s is the *mahatmya* literature. These texts were written to celebrate the holiness of something, about which the text invariably declaims with hyperbolic praise. These *mahatmya*s can be useful and informative documents—as we shall see in chapter 2—but one must recognize that their context is mythical, not historical. One cannot read them as reportage—as giving an objective description of the site or of pilgrims' attitudes toward it—and to read them in this way ignores the writers' genuine interests. *Mahatmya*s were often written by local brahmins who had clear financial motives to magnify the site's holiness, because their livelihood came from pilgrim gifts—essentially, these *mahatmya*s are advertisements. Pilgrims may or may not have heard these stories, and even if they did, one cannot assume that pilgrims believed them. These *mahatmya*s can be valuable documents that reveal a great deal about a place, but they must be balanced with other types of sources.

A further danger in using these *mahatmya*s uncritically is that the descriptions in these texts convey the notion that pilgrimage places have fixed, unchanging identities. This ignores the possibility of substantive changes in a *tirtha* over time, mirroring the changes in the larger society. Hardwar has clearly undergone striking changes in the past two hundred years, the pace of this change continues to accelerate, and other scholars have shown that such

trends are not unique to Hardwar.[4] Indeed, it would be very strange if changes in Indian society were not also reflected in pilgrimage places, but one would never know this if the *mahatmya*s were one's major source.

To my knowledge, no Western scholar has ever studied a Hindu *tirtha* exclusively through the *mahatmya* literature, and it is unrealistic to expect that one would. The question is the relative weight given to this type of source. Some works have given them considerably greater weight, the best example being Diana Eck's *Banaras, City of Light.* As one reviewer notes, "Eck relies overwhelmingly on two sources, classical Sanskrit texts, and the 'text' of the city. . . . Both sources are doubtlessly rich, but relatively inert." Her bibliography shows that these were by no means her only sources, but her reliance on them creates a picture of Benares "as romantic and idealised as the literature she relies on" (Kumar 1986: 317). Yet despite its idealized quality, Eck's picture of Benares is important to acknowledge, for it attempts to convey the mythic quality that has made Benares sacred to Hindus.[5]

My guiding principle has been to use all possible sources in attempting to construct as broad and complete a picture as possible. Every source can tell us something, and it is important to read them carefully. The *mahatmya* perspective may be idealized and atemporal, but it is testimony from people inside the tradition, and I think it essential to pay attention to this. At the same time, any commitment to providing a verifiable "historical" context means that the *mahatmya*s' mythic perspective must be balanced by other sources. Of course, these "historical" sources must also be evaluated just as critically as the *mahatmya* literature.

In this book, chapters 2 and 3 paint different pictures of Hardwar based on these differing textual sources. Chapter 2 presents Hardwar's "timeless" reality as a *tirtha*, as drawn from the *mahatmya*s and other Sanskrit texts, whereas chapter 3 traces its history and development, based on sources drawn from literature, epigraphy, travelers' accounts, *panda* records, printed pamphlets, and government reports. The *mahatmya*s' Hardwar exists out of time, and this timelessness is a key mythic quality. The historical Hardwar has changed tremendously, especially in the past two centuries, and this change has been driven more by economic forces than by any sense of its holiness. In the end, of course, these differing accounts do not describe two different places but are differing perspectives on the same place. The atemporal is coterminous with the temporal—even now, for the faithful who come to Hardwar—and the challenge is to see the simultaneous interaction of these two.

This book looks not only at ideas of place but also at groups of people who live and work there—and whose interests shape Hardwar's portrayal as a holy place. Here we are clearly in the present, with the sort of field study formerly

associated mainly with the social sciences. Every pilgrimage place has an identity shaped by two important groups of people—residents and visitors—yet even recent work shows a tendency to focus on one or the other of these groups. Ann Gold describes the impetus behind *Fruitful Journeys* as an attempt to "know pilgrims in their daily lives, . . . based on a village whose residents are much else before they are pilgrims and for much more of the time than they are pilgrims" (Gold 1989: 2). David Haberman's *Journey through the Twelve Forests* gracefully describes his rich encounter with Braj's mythic geography and with his companions, but he says relatively little about the interest groups who control the site. Other scholars, such as Vidyarthi and van der Veer, have focused their attention on pilgrimage sites and their resident providers but have given little attention to the pilgrims themselves.[6]

All these works have been helpful models for me, yet I find this limited focus disquieting. If one wants to discern what van der Veer calls "the production and management of meaning" (1989: 63), one must clearly pay attention to both pilgrim and provider, and to their constant and often hereditary interaction. Meaning—in this case, the ascription of certain ideas about a place—is not simply given by one group to another, because both groups must accept it. To focus on only one of these two groups is to deny agency to the other.

This insistence on examining both pilgrims' and providers' perspectives is another difference between this and other works on Hindu pilgrimage. Neither pilgrim nor provider exists in a vacuum. Each plays a role and has genuine interests, and their complementary interaction gives Hardwar (for example) its continuing vitality as a pilgrimage place. Chapters 4 through 7 explore differing aspects of this interaction, first from the perspective of the resident providers—businessmen, *panda*s, and ascetics—and then from the perspective of the visitors.

An additional shifting perspective is my own presence in the text. The chapters on Hardwar's mythical and historical dimensions (2 and 3) find me further in the background, seeking to construct these pictures of Hardwar through close textual reading. This process can never be completely objective—after all, I have prioritized some sources and interpretations over others—but a balancing factor here is my commitment to taking all of these sources seriously. My presence as narrator becomes more prominent with chapter 4, although my profile shifts during the telling. These chapters do not primarily recount my own experience, as one finds in Karve's "On the Road," Mokashi's *Palkhi*, or Gold's *Fruitful Journeys*, although the last ascribes the narration to her Rajasthani alter ego, Ann-bai. Nor do I present myself as a detached observer, as in Deleury's *Cult of Vithoba* or Hawley's introduction to *At Play with Krishna*. Rather, these latter chapters have a shifting narrative perspective,

as in Daniel's *Fluid Signs*, Sax's *Mountain Goddess*, and Haberman's *Journey through the Twelve Forests*. Sometimes I speak as subject, reporting my own experience and perspective; at other times, I speak in the third person, relaying—as well as choosing and evaluating—other people's ideas and perspectives. My position as narrator has been guided by my sense of what was appropriate to present a coherent and accurate picture.

Ethnographic fieldwork inevitably raises issues connected with honesty and integrity—ideally retaining one's own, and respecting that of others. Although I didn't realize I would need to think about these issues when I was writing proposals and making research plans, they forcefully appeared soon after I arrived in Hardwar, particularly during my solitary walks along the Ganges. Hardwar had many things that attracted me, but my primary reason for being there was to finish my PhD, a necessary step toward the graduate student's Holy Grail—a job. This urgency was compounded by financial worries because I had no outside funding and was paying for everything out of pocket. Yet the more I talked to people, and the more I found out about Hardwar, the more I found myself confronted with ethical questions. How should I present myself? How should I describe what I was doing, and how much should I tell people—particularly since for many of these people the notion of "fieldwork" would have been incomprehensibly alien? How could I balance my need for "data" about Hardwar with respect for others—neither misrepresenting myself nor exploiting them as "informants"? Or to say it another way, to what extent would my means (interactions with other people in Hardwar) be merely instrumental to my ultimate personal goal—a regular, salaried income?

Robert Gross succinctly summarizes fieldwork's potentially dark side:

> The collection of needed field research data is characterized by a certain degree of duplicity. This duplicity—manifested most artfully in terms of impression management—involves social manipulation and the structuring of instrumental relationships with others in order to obtain data and information. At best this situation of inauthenticity and deception reflects the way we carry on our day-to-day affairs with others; at worst, it could be detrimental and damaging. Regardless of the motivation or the rationale for the research, the ethnographer becomes a double-agent seeking information about others for personal gain and bourgeois career advancement. . . . Data, in whatever form, essentially becomes a "marketable" commodity that is derived from social and cultural experiences and is handled in much the same way as are material goods and wealth. (1992: 81)

In fall 1989, I couldn't have stated this so bluntly, but as I wandered around Hardwar in those early months, my conscience kept moving these issues to the top of the pile and moved me to frame some guiding principles. One of these was that I would not lie to people—a pretty basic rule for ethical human interaction. This ruled out becoming someone's disciple as a research strategy—a strategy Gross himself pursued, despite his stated distaste for such false relationships.[7] Aside from my ethical objections, taking initiation also struck me as a tactical error—it would open up some avenues of inquiry but just as definitively close others down. A second shaping principle was the recognition—never consciously debated and decided, but simply acknowledged—that retaining my personal integrity was ultimately more important than succeeding in my research. If there were things I couldn't find out in ways that felt genuine and truthful, then that was going to have to be OK. This attentiveness to how I presented myself and how I treated others was reinforced by a continual sense of being on display—when total strangers could identify me as "that foreigner living in Kaku's house," I realized that I could never count on anonymity.

In fact, I didn't learn everything in that first year's work, and I still haven't. This is one of the reasons I keep going back, but the more important reason is to see my friends. Despite Gross's characterization of the duplicitous nature of fieldwork, I have consistently found that my most valuable sources have involved long-term relationships—that is, real friendships based on honesty, affection, and trust. As this circle has gradually expanded over the years, so has my access to "data." This hasn't meant the end of ethical dilemmas, which are part of any life—as when an understanding or opinion may be upsetting to one or more of those friends. Just how does one balance a scholar's responsibility to tell the truth with one's personal loyalties? In the same way one does this in life's nonscholarly arenas—whether with one's spouse, children, friends, or colleagues—that is, with honesty, compassion, and trust. It seems to me that anyone aspiring to genuine integrity will seek to exercise it in all areas of life—private and public, personal and professional—and any other mode is opportunism and exploitation. I'm old enough to know that I'm not perfect—and to really know this, and not just say it to sound humble—but I can honestly say I seek to live with integrity, consistency, and transparency.

Finally, this work is not only a textual exploration and a social history but also a description and analysis of modern Hindu religious life. My particular interest has been the religious lives of modern, urban Hindus, who until now have been largely ignored, if not actually disrespected. Yet even though urban Hindu beliefs and practices may be different from what one finds in villages—a differing social environment leading to differing expressions—this does not make them less Hindu.[8] These people have been affected by the changes

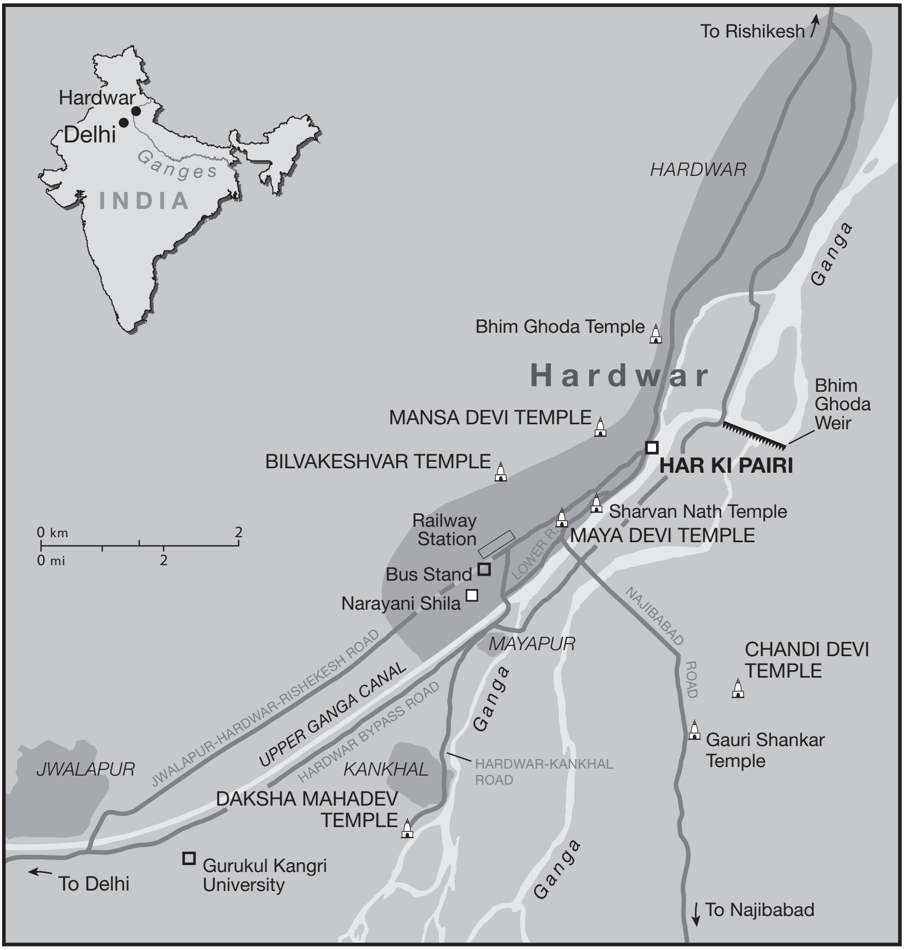
transforming Indian society and have been reinterpreting traditional symbols and understandings in light of their experience. Just as with many other religious communities, modern Hindus often have to work to harmonize traditional symbols with their contemporary worldview. In all these cases, one finds a search for meaning at the dawn of the twenty-first century—a search that can and should command any thoughtful person's attention.

Hardwar: General Orientation

Hardwar sits on the western bank of the Ganges on the southern fringe of the Shiwaliks, the foothills to the Himalayas. The town's oldest section is only a few hundred yards wide, squeezed between the Ganges and the hills; north and south of the city the hills recede, and the settled areas expand accordingly. The 2001 census (*Census of India*, 2004: 3.62) records 220,767 residents in the Hardwar urban area—an area that includes the adjoining towns of Kankhal and Jwalapur, as well as the developed regions in between. Hardwar and Kankhal are almost exclusively Hindu, but Jwalapur's Muslim community is indispensable to Hardwar's daily business, and local Hindus have historically had harmonious relations with them. Hardwar was the smallest of the three towns when the municipality was incorporated in 1868, but explosive growth since Partition in 1947 has completely changed this balance. Chapter 3 discusses Hardwar's expansion and development in far greater detail. (see map on p. 12.)

Hardwar's explosive growth has also increased its political importance. For over a century, it was administered as part of the Saharanpur district (Uttar Pradesh), but in fall 1989, the U.P. state government created the Hardwar district, with the city as its administrative center. The decision was surely influenced by administrative concerns—to facilitate governing an ever more densely settled region—but it also clearly reflected Hardwar's political importance as a power center. Saharanpur is a much larger city and has an important rail junction, but compared with Hardwar, it is an isolated, insular market town. Hardwar's political importance is also a function of its visibility. As a high-status destination drawing visitors from all over the world, it is thus a node in the global communications network, and it is only half a day's journey from the national capital. All of these factors—as well as the local residents' generally conservative tendencies—have induced many Hindu organizations to establish themselves in Hardwar and to use the city as a base for political action, as is discussed at greater length in the concluding chapter.

Gaining district status not only reflected Hardwar's political importance but also increased it, by channeling greater power and patronage directly through



Hardwar. District status is thus a tangible sign of its growing importance and a reason that this influence will continue. This influence has only increased after the 2001 formation of Uttarakhand State (the state's original name was Uttaranchal, but was changed in 2008). According to the most recent *Census of India*, Hardwar is the largest of Uttarakhand's thirteen districts and has almost 20 percent of the state's entire population (2004: 2.IV). It is also one of the few urban centers in a poor, largely rural state—according to one of my friends, Hardwar accounts for 68 percent of Uttarakhand state's total revenue.[9] Hardwar's regional economic weight, proximity to the state and national capitals, and general political visibility ensure that its importance will continue to grow.

Hardwar's primary economy is based on buying and selling to service the local pilgrim trade and on serving as the supply point for smaller towns in the

mountains. Hardwar is also the starting point for the Upper Ganges Canal, which begins just south of the town. The canal was built for irrigation and for more than 150 years has watered the dry but fertile land between the Ganges and the Yamuna Rivers, but its construction profoundly affected Hardwar by reshaping the city's landscape. In the mid-1960s, the government opened two large factories in the area, both built with Soviet assistance: just south of Hardwar is Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (B.H.E.L.), which manufactures electrical generators and components, and nearer to Rishikesh is the Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Limited (I.D.P.L.) plant. Aside from these, there are no major industries, and despite its continual growth in the past fifty years, in many ways Hardwar still feels like a small town.

The primary reason for Hardwar's historic and continuing importance—as well as the source of income for most of its residents—is its long history as a Hindu pilgrimage site. The pilgrimage region (*kshetra*) is much larger than the present town, and although the region's southern border has remained constant at the town of Kankhal (three miles south), the northern border has shifted considerably over time. Sanskrit texts such as the *Varaha Purana* and the nineteenth-century *Mayapurimahatmya* (MPM) describe the *kshetra* as extending to Lakshman Jhula, north of modern Rishikesh, but now it extends only to Saptarishi Ashram, about three miles north of Hardwar. Hardwar's local guidebooks usually devote a section to Rishikesh, since many pilgrims go there for the day, but it is seen as distinct in a way that Kankhal and Saptarishi are not.[10] Even though these latter sites have their own histories and mythic charters, they are still seen as fundamentally connected to Hardwar.

The region has changed names as well as shapes. The oldest name seems to be Mayapuri, since this name was used by Hsuan Tsang in the seventh century CE. The name's source is unclear, but Cunningham reports that local people attributed it to Maya Devi, a local goddess whose present temple may date back to the tenth century.[11] Hardwar's other epithets highlight its identity as a gateway through which one can gain access to some higher reality, and although this is true for all Hindu pilgrimage sites (*tirtha*s), it is embedded in Hardwar's very name—the word *dwar* (Sanskrit *dvara*) is cognate with English "door." Among Hardwar's epithets are the "door to Vishnu" (*hari-dvar*), the "door to Shiva" (*hara-dvar*), "the door of the Ganges" (*ganga-dvar*), "the door to heaven" (*svarga-dvar*), and the "door to liberation" (*moksha-dvar*).[12]

This gateway theme is central to Hardwar, and it is articulated in many different ways. Geologically, the surrounding Shiwalik hills are a transitional zone between the Himalayas and the north Indian plain. Hardwar is at their outer edge, and the contrast between the hills and the flatland is strikingly visible.

Ritually, Hardwar is said to be the precise place where the Ganges leaves the mountains and enters the plains, and this liminal quality gives it special sanctity. Mythologically, Hardwar is a gateway between heaven and earth: one of its charter myths describes how the Ganges descended to earth to grant final release (through her purifying touch) to King Sagar's sixty thousand sons, who had been burned to ash by an ascetic's curse. As with many myths, this story provides a model for contemporary religious ritual. Hardwar is a major site for *asthivisarjana*, a rite in which people consign the ashes of their dead to the Ganges in the hope that the sacred river will convey the departed to heaven. Finally, Hardwar is the physical gateway through which pilgrims ascend to the Himalayan shrines, and it marks the definitive transition between the plains, the abode of human beings, and the mountains, the abode of the gods. All of these aspects are discussed later in greater detail.

Aside from being the gateway par excellence, Hardwar is also famous as a site for the Kumbha Mela ("Festival of the Pot"), the world's largest religious gathering. Although the Kumbha Mela rotates between four sites—Hardwar, Allahabad, Ujjain, and Nasik—the first two are much larger than the others, with the Allahabad Kumbha Mela the largest of all.[13] Not only is the Kumbha Mela a momentous religious occasion but it also has been a vital factor behind Hardwar's recent material development. Late-nineteenth-century festival crowds impelled the British authorities to build essential infrastructure, particularly for public health and sanitation. In the twentieth century, the Kumbha Mela's growth has been a significant factor behind Hardwar's sustained building boom, as individuals, sects, and regional groups have sought to establish a place there and to finish construction before the Mela. For several centuries, the Kumbha Mela has been a marketplace and spectacle as well as a religious festival, and it is still a prime-time media event and an economic bonanza: on one hand, sparking publicity and traffic for Hardwar, and on the other generating an entire year's revenue for local merchants, who charge whatever the market will bear.

More subtly, the Kumbha Mela's presence may have helped to foster Hardwar's unusually catholic religious atmosphere. No single deity "owns" Hardwar; it is a place in which all deities have a space. This catholic atmosphere is reinforced by Hardwar's hundreds of ashrams and *dharamshala*s (pilgrim rest houses), at which Hindus from any region and sectarian persuasion can find their specialized niche. Since each institution has a temple with a patron deity, there are hundreds of temples scattered through the city—reinforcing its identity as a religious place. Most of these temples are visited only by residents and immediate neighbors, but a few draw significant numbers, and these important sites deserve a brief introduction.

Important Sites

Hardwar's most important site is unquestionably the bathing place at Har-ki-Pairi. This name literally refers to the feet (*pairi*) of Vishnu (Hari), which are believed to be imprinted on a stone at one of the small temples there, but it has come to designate the entire bathing area. Har-ki-Pairi's most important spot is the bathing pool named Brahmakund (the "pool of Brahma"). At one time, Brahmakund was an actual pool—a deeper spot in a small branch off the main channel of the Ganges—but since 1916, Brahmakund has looked more like a river, bounded on the west by an enormous masonry *ghat*, and on the east by a narrow concrete island set in the middle of the stream. This concrete island effectively doubles Brahmakund's bathing space, by giving access to both sides of the pool. Seven temples are clustered immediately around Brahmakund, and there are many more in the area immediately downstream. Most of these temples house multiple deities, and with one possible exception, they were built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during the periods of intense development that are discussed at greater length in chapter 3.

Har-ki-Pairi is clearly a tourist attraction as well as a bathing place. Visitors come throughout the day but are concentrated in the morning and the evening—the former for bathing, the latter to view the *arati* to the goddess Ganga, which is a dramatic spectacle that can draw thousands on a busy night. This constant pilgrim traffic presents Hardwar's residents with continual financial opportunity—from people running shops and temples, to the wandering hawkers selling everything from religious books to novelty items, to the ever-present beggars—but also imparts a certain tone. Har-ki-Pairi may be a holy place, but its atmosphere is hardly serene. The main market begins at Har-ki-Pairi's southern edge, and in its busiest times, the bathing place is pervaded by a commercial, even carnival atmosphere. Many visitors enjoy this atmosphere as part of their experience, and some residents lament that it detracts from the gravity due to this sacred place, but both would acknowledge that the site is extremely vibrant.

Har-ki-Pairi may be Hardwar's most important bathing place, but there are many others on both sides of the river. The bathing *ghat*s on the river's east side (across from the town) are built on undeveloped land owned by the Irrigation Department, and for many years, these were much quieter than Har-ki-Pairi. As the city's hotels and lodging houses have gone increasingly upscale, this region has gotten more crowded, as poorer pilgrims displaced from the city have settled there. The *ghat*s on the western (town) side are either built in front of shops, such as at Subhash Ghat and Gau Ghat, or are devoted to rites for the

dead, whose impurity makes them inappropriate rites for Har-ki-Pairi. Immediately south of Har-ki-Pairi is the Asthi-Pravah Ghat at which people immerse bones and ash from a cremation pyre; further south is Kushavarta Ghat, the primary site for *pindadan*, a commemorative ancestral rite prescribed by the traditional pilgrimage manuals.[14]

Although Hardwar is most famous as a bathing place, it also has some important temples. Hardwar's two major Shiva temples are Kankhal's Daksha Mahadev and the forest temple at Bilvakeshvar, which are, respectively, four miles south and one mile west of Har-ki-Pairi. Both sites are associated with an important episode in Shiva's mythology: Daksha Mahadev is where Shiva destroyed Daksha's sacrifice after the latter's insults had caused Sati, Shiva's wife, to take her own life, and Bilvakeshvar is reportedly where Shiva first revealed himself to Parvati, his future bride.[15]

Both temples claim that their primary image is a "self-manifested" (*svayambhu*) *linga*—a spontaneous manifestation of Shiva himself that is believed to be much more powerful than any consecrated image. Both temples also have multiple additional shrines, but their ambience is sharply different. The current Daksha temple was built in 1962—the earliest recorded temple dates from 1810—and is a large and magnificent structure. The main building contains the *linga* that is the temple's primary image, as well as a pit said to be the site of Daksha's sacrificial fire.[16] Further attractions include the complex's other temples—to the ten goddesses known as Mahavidyas, to the Ganges, and to Hanuman—and across the street is the ashram of Anandamayi Ma, a modern saint who died in 1982. The Daksha temple complex includes shops selling ritual articles, books, snacks, and souvenirs; a ceremonial gateway with an enormous statue of Shiva carrying Sati's body; plenty of space for visitor parking; and carnival rides and games in the summer season. The atmosphere is almost always noisy and busy and, at festival times, positively chaotic. The temple is controlled by the ascetics of the Mahanirvani *akhara*, who live close by.

In contrast, Bilvakeshvar is a quiet forest temple at which the only things for sale are flowers for worship—and that only on festival days. Bilvakeshvar also has multiple shrines, which are divided into three major areas. The central area has the *svayambhu* ("self-manifested") *linga* of Bilvakeshvar; a second Shiva temple reportedly established by the philosopher Shankaracarya; smaller temples to Ganesh, Bhairava, and other deities; and a building housing the resident ascetics—here, the Niranjani *akhara*. In the 1990s, this central area received extensive patronage from film composer Gulshan Kumar, who not only renovated and enlarged the main Bilvakeshvar temple but also financed the construction of several other temples, including one to Shiva Ardhanarishvara (a half-man, half-woman form).[17] The second area is a quarter of a mile north and

has some temples built around a sacred well (by which Parvati is said to have done her austerities to become Shiva's bride) and a cave in which the ascetic Bhola Giri lived for many years. The final area is at the base of a hill east of Bilvakeshvar; it has a small temple dedicated to Rama and a cave with rock-cut relief images of Ganesh and two goddesses. I have found no reference to Bilvakeshvar in the Sanskrit *purana*s, but the Hardwar *mahatmya* traditions attest that it has been an important site at least since the early 1600s.[18]

Hardwar also has three noteworthy goddess temples—Maya Devi in the heart of town and Mansa Devi and Chandi Devi on top of the surrounding hills. Their present popularity is inversely proportional to their antiquity: Maya Devi is the oldest but has been almost completely marginalized; Chandi Devi was built in 1829, although earlier visitors attest to a shrine there, and Mansa Devi is not mentioned as late as 1927 but has become Hardwar's second most popular site.[19] Mansa Devi's success is partly due to its prime location near Har-ki-Pairi, but the temple's managing trust has also been extremely astute, as is described in greater detail in chapter 7. They have mythically connected Mansa Devi to other local and regional goddesses and also developed the temple as a local attraction. The temple complex has restaurants, a library, and shops selling books and religious articles, but the master stroke was building a cable car from the town to the temple in 1984. This not only made it easier for devotees to visit the temple but also functions as a visitor attraction in its own right. For all these reasons, the Mansa Devi temple is a case study for successfully developing a religious attraction.

The final site mentioned here is Bhim Ghoda, a small pool surrounded by temples about a quarter mile north of Har-ki-Pairi. Bhim Ghoda's myths are mainly connected with the five Pandava brothers—the protagonists in the epic *Mahabharata*—and the site's charter myth describes how Bhima (one of these brothers) created the pool by pushing on the ground with his knee. The temple complex has a small cave around which a temple to Bhima has been built, and the surrounding temples have a variety of Vaishnava images—Ram, Sita, and Lakshman, the *ras lila* (the circle dance in which Krishna is surrounded by his female devotees), the remaining Pandavas, Krishna, and Draupadi. Some of the images are stone reliefs, which usually indicate greater age, whereas others are the standard commercially available images. Bhim Ghoda is well attested in earlier sources, and even a century ago, British documents describe it as Hardwar's second most important site. Its decline was accelerated (if not actually caused) by two twentieth-century British engineering projects. The first came in 1900, when the railway was extended from Hardwar to Dehra Dun. The railway passes in front of the shrine on an elevated causeway and thus effectively cuts it off from the road. The more damaging blow came when

the Bhimghoda weir was built in 1916, after which Har-ki-Pairi's water supply was drawn from a different channel than the one running near Bhim Ghoda. The new weir effectively dried up Bhim Ghoda's supply channel and cut off its water. At this point, the only thing keeping the site from total oblivion is its location on the main road.

This short list is hardly complete, for there are many other sites that people visit or that have historic or mythological importance: the Pashupatinath temple, built in 1820 by the *sanyasi mahant* Sharvan Nath; Saptarishi, at which the Ganges is said to have divided into seven streams to keep from disturbing seven meditating sages; and the Bhairav Akhara and Narayani Shila, which Cunningham described as Hardwar's oldest sites, along with Maya Devi (IGI 1885: 332).[20] All of these sites have some claim to history, but contemporary visitors are far more likely to visit the temples and ashrams north of Har-ki-pairi, which have been largely built since the 1970s. Many ashrams such as the Jayram Ashram and Pavan Dham have religious tableaux (*dharmik jhankiya*) displaying scenes from Hindu mythology—sometimes electrified and mechanical, sometimes fabricated in colored mirror mosaics, sometimes just painted or sculpted, in both small scale and grand. Other unusual attractions are the Vaishno Devi temple, which contains a miniature version of the path to Jammu's Vaishno Devi shrine, and the Bharat Mata Mandir, which not only enshrines the divinities and heroes of Indian culture but also deifies Mother India herself. Although to my outsider's eye, these ashrams often seemed gaudy and garish, many pilgrims like them precisely because they are so "modern," and more are being built all the time.

During my initial fieldwork in 1989–90, one of my dearest friends and most helpful sources was a seventy-year-old *sadhu* named Baba Amarnath. He used to laugh at my research—particularly my efforts to fix dates—and told me on several occasions that I was making a great effort to study Hardwar, but that I was focusing on the "externals," not the essence. This introduction has largely focused on what he would call the externals—information readily available to any visitor. The task now is to try to uncover the essence that has made Hardwar special to Hindus, recognizing that these externals and essences are simultaneous realities. The real difference lies not in the sites themselves but in the perceptions and the emotions through which people transform them from space into place.

As mentioned earlier in this introduction, the following chapters take up this exploration of place from a variety of perspectives—that is, examining the different ways that these ideas are framed and presented. This book stems from my work in Hardwar, which is a particular place, and chapters 2 and 3 are exclusively focused on Hardwar itself. Chapter 2 explores Hardwar's sacred history

and identity, which is inextricably tied to the Ganges—that is, the "why" for this particular place, based on Hindu sacred texts. Chapter 3 chronicles Hardwar's secular history and development, in which the city's transformation over time has often been driven by worldly forces, such as shifting trade routes, political instability, and improved transportation. These two pictures present very different visions of Hardwar, yet both are emphatically real; the latter has shaped the physical and social environment in which people find themselves, whereas the former makes it important in the first place. Like a stereoscopic image, these two pictures converge at the cusp of the twentieth century in local Hindu efforts to retain control over their festivals and over the Ganges. On one hand, these efforts came out of a genuine sense of Hardwar as a holy place, yet they were also clearly efforts to resist British colonial domination. These two chapters give the religious and historical context—that sense of place—against which to set the rest of the book, and in these parts, my presence is largely behind the scenes.

This perspective shifts dramatically in chapters 4 through 8, which examine the "who," "what," and "how" of Hardwar's modern pilgrimage. Although these chapters focus on Hardwar, they seek to examine the forces and the interest groups at work in any pilgrim town—for which Hardwar provides the concrete case study. Although some circumstances are unique to Hardwar, other structural patterns can be found not only in north India but also at pilgrimage sites throughout the world—as I discovered while visiting Assisi in 2001, when I found myself thinking, "I've never been here, so why does this feel so familiar?" As noted before, I become a more visible character as the text progresses—in large part because much of the material comes from my experiences and conversations with people in Hardwar. I hope that the material in these later chapters will be interesting and useful to anyone interested in sacred places and sacred travel, or in the opportunities for human transformation that both of these can provide.

The following chapter begins to tell this tale. It will examine why Hardwar is special to Hindus, and the primary sources here will be the stories about Hardwar in various Sanskrit documents, primarily *purana*s and *mahatmya*s. An outsider might characterize this as Hardwar's mythic history, as opposed to its actual history, but one needs to remember that many Hindus believe that the events in these stories actually happened a long, long time ago. Of course, people can still find stories rich and meaningful, even if they do not literally believe them, and among modern Hindus, one finds both of these perspectives—just as one might among modern Jews, Christians, or other religious communities. For this reason, these texts must be respected as conveying genuine Hindu perspectives, even though as an outsider my own stance may occasionally be more critical.

2

Hardwar in Sanskrit Sources

Textual references to Hardwar clearly reveal its important place in the Hindu religious landscape. This chapter examines the picture of Hardwar painted in various Sanskrit texts: the Epics (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*), the *purana*s, and two manuscript traditions, the *Haridvaramahatmya* (hereafter HDM) and the *Mayapurimahatmya* (hereafter MPM). All of these sources were written by people "within" the tradition and thus show how some Hindus—the text's authors—have conceived of Hardwar. These texts were authored by a literate and presumably brahmin elite, whose corporate and cultural concerns undoubtedly shape Hardwar's portrayal in the texts. Given the possibility that these texts described how things ought to be rather than how things are, a careful reader trying to discern the latter will cross-check these accounts against historical data or modern practice. Yet with these two caveats, these Sanskrit texts—which are legitimate documents with a distinct point of view—can be both useful and edifying.

Hardwar appears in these texts in several distinct contexts: as the location for important mythical events, as a spot to perform pilgrimage rituals, and finally in *mahatmya* texts that specifically focus on Hardwar's "greatness" and were clearly written to promote its holiness.[1] Given the mass of material, the scattered and often fragmented quality of the references, and the desire to avoid needless repetition, I propose to discuss these sources under these three general categories. The chapter's first sections examine two

central mythical events: the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice and the descent of the Ganges from heaven. The following section focuses on Hardwar as a theater for two major types of religious activity: pilgrimage rites and asceticism. The final sections specifically examine Hardwar's *mahatmya*s, both from the published *purana*s and from unpublished manuscript traditions. When these *mahatmya*s contain passages relevant to one of the earlier sections, they are discussed earlier rather than later.[2] Yet even though it makes sense to extract these pieces from the *mahatmyas* for examination, it also essential to give some sense of the whole text, since these *mahatmya*s contain depth and detail that the shorter texts do not.

This is especially true for the two manuscript *mahatmya*s, which are significantly longer than any of the other texts. Based on the extant manuscripts, the HDM (attributed to the *Brahmanda Purana*) dates from the early 1600s, whereas the MPM (attributed to the *Kedarakhand* of the *Skanda Purana*) appears about 1800. Both manuscripts draw from established *purana*s, but neither can be found in its putative source. Puranic ascription was clearly a device to confer authority on these texts, but the *mahatmya*'s compilers drew freely from many different sources. The two texts are also completely different and clearly independent of each other. The earlier manuscript is much smaller, focuses more specifically on Hardwar, and has a distinctly Vaishnava tone. The latter *mahatmya* is much longer, covers a much larger geographic region, and is clearly a composite document—the first half shows clear Shaiva influence, whereas the latter exhibits a Vaishnava tinge.

Daksha's Lord: Death, Destruction, and Restoration

The Daksha narrative is the most important mythic event associated with Hardwar, although there is some textual disagreement over this event's actual location.[3] This story is an important charter myth for both Shaivas and Shaktas, and it appears in the *Mahabharata* (MHB) and more than a dozen *purana*s.[4] A long version of this story also appears in the MPM, where it serves as the charter myth establishing Hardwar's sanctity. The sharp differences between these accounts point partly to different phases in the story's development but partly to differing authorial concerns.

The story's key events are the death of Shiva's wife Sati and the destruction and restoration of her father Daksha's sacrifice. The site now identified as the locus for these events is the temple of Daksheshvara ("Daksha's Lord") in Kankhal, about three miles south of Hardwar. In response to my questions, one person there told the following story:

> Daksha was the son of Brahma, the creator, and he carried out much of the work of creation himself, and grew very powerful. Although he gave his daughter Sati to be Shiva's wife, he was a proud man and felt contempt for Shiva, since the latter was a beggar who lived on alms, smoked hashish, had no home, no money, no family, and ghosts and goblins as retainers.
>
> At one time Daksha gave a great sacrifice to which he invited all the gods, but as a deliberate insult he did not invite Lord Shiva. The news of the sacrifice traveled all over the world, and when Sati heard about it, she wanted to go. Shiva tried to dissuade her by telling her that to show up uninvited would be to invite insult, but Sati remained obstinate, and in the end Shiva let her go. He sent her off on his mount Nandi, with a few of his retainers as an escort.
>
> When Sati arrived at the sacrifice, she found no place reserved for her husband. When she asked about this, Daksha responded by insulting her and her husband in front of the whole assembly. Sati was furious. She sat in *sinhasan* (a yoga sitting posture), focused her mind on Shiva, and a yogic fire erupted from her navel that completely destroyed her body. Her retainers raised some resistance, but were so outnumbered that they had to retreat to Mount Kailas.
>
> When Shiva heard of Sati's death, he was so angry that he tore a matted lock of hair (*jata*) from each side of his head and dashed them to the ground. One of these became Virabhadra, the other became Mahakali (both of these are powerful and destructive deities). At Shiva's command these two destroyed Daksha's sacrifice, killed or injured the guests, and finally cut off Daksha's head. The conflict ended when the gods placated Shiva by praising him. Through Shiva's grace Daksha was restored to life, and the sacrifice was completed, but as a lesson to Daksha Shiva decreed that even though the place would bear Daksha's name, worship there would be to Shiva alone.[5]

My informant rightly claimed that his source for this story was from the *Shiva Purana*, which contains the longest version of this story; shorter but substantially similar versions appear in the *Skanda Purana* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. The *Skanda Purana*'s version is clearly related to the *Shiva Purana* because the two share both common verses and narrative similarities. In such cases, the shorter text is usually assumed to be the earlier, but this is not necessarily true here. Much of the *Shiva Purana* story is panegyric, which a

discerning editor could have stripped away, leaving the narrative skeleton intact. The *Bhagavata Purana* shows the same general outlines as these two, but individual verses are not so easily traceable between the texts.[6] These three versions seamlessly weave a single narrative describing the story's two major parts—Sati's death and the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice.

Yet based on other accounts, such narrative unity is the exception. In several of the other accounts, Sati dies either prior to the sacrifice, such as in the *Vishnu Purana* (Vi.) and the *Kurma Purana* (K.), or dies not on the sacrificial grounds, but in her marital home, as in the *Brahma Purana* (Br.) and the *Varaha Purana* (Var.). Several accounts mention only the destruction of the sacrifice and not Sati's death (MHB, Var.). Others focus on Sati's death and the subsequent establishment of the *shaktipitha*s ("seats of the Goddess"), but largely ignore the destruction of the sacrifice, such as the *Matsya Purana* (M.) and the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* (Bvv). These variants clearly reveal that there were originally two different stories that have been joined more or less successfully. This judgment concurs with Sircar's, who traces the parts of this story to two separate accounts in the Brahmanas: one where Daksha insults his daughter, the other the destruction of Daksha by Rudra/Shiva (1973: 6).

Aside from establishing Shiva as the supreme god, this story raises several important themes. One is that devotionally oriented religious practice is superior to ritually oriented practice. Despite careful preparations, Shiva's minions destroy Daksha's sacrifice, which is completed only after Daksha acknowledges Shiva as the supreme god. Another important undercurrent is family relationships and conflict, particularly for Indian women, who are expected to transfer loyalties from their natal to their marital families. Sati has strong bonds to both Shiva and Daksha, and her behavior shows these divided loyalties. She wants to attend the sacrifice to see her family—and in several versions, goes despite Shiva's objections—but as a good wife, her primary loyalty is to her husband, even when the critic is her father.[7]

This tale also provides the frame story for the origin of the *shaktipitha*s, a set of goddess shrines that span the Indian subcontinent. According to the story, after Sati's death Shiva roamed the universe carrying her corpse, in a frenzied dance of grief. In the end, Vishnu used his discus to cut off bits of her body, and when Sati's body was gone, Shiva went to the Himalayas to meditate. Those places where parts of Sati's body fell to the earth became "seats" (*pitha*s) of the Mother Goddess, places where her presence is both immediate and potent.[8] This story provides a way to identify various local goddesses with an underlying divine power, by conceiving of them as differing manifestations of a single primordial Goddess. It also provides a conceptual scheme to unify the

subcontinent as one religious whole—using the image of the body—and the *shaktipitha* network stretches across the subcontinent, though many of the sites are in Bengal.

In addition to the Epics and the *purana*s, there is an extended version of the Daksha story in the *Mayapurimahatmya* (MPM), chapters 3–5. A later section looks at the *mahatmya* as a whole, but it seems reasonable to compare this account against the others. The plot follows the general outline in the *Shiva-Skanda-Bhagavata Purana* accounts, but most of the text appears to have been independently composed.[9] It follows the *Shiva Purana* and *Skanda Purana* in voicing Shiva's objection that going uninvited to the sacrifice could open Sati to disrespect.[10] Finally, its description of Sati's death by jumping into the sacred fire clearly shows the influence of the *Skanda Purana* because this image occurs only in Sk. 1.1.3.22–23.

The MPM's compiler(s) also introduced new elements to heighten the dramatic effect. One piquant example appears after Sati has indicated her desire to attend the sacrifice. Shiva first warns her that she should not go uninvited and then declares that one should not associate with the wicked, but rather with those like oneself. Sati's caustic retort not only betrays some sore spots in their usually harmonious marriage, but also foreshadows the abuse she will hear from her own father.

> O Blessed One, O Great Lord, you have spoken truly, for you have no father, brother, no friends or relations. With whom [could such relationship] take place for you, the Lord? O Great Lord, your ornaments are serpents, you don't have a home, you are worthless (*nirguna*) and have no wealth (*nirmaya*), how could [any] one be friends with you, O Lord, Leader of the world? O Lord, how could anyone at all have a relationship with you, [since] you wear ash [from the cremation ground, use] a skull for a dish, and are [similar to] Death [himself]! (MPM 3.32–35)

Stung by these sarcastic remarks (*vyangoktam*), Shiva tells her to go and declares that fate has caused her obstinacy to see the sacrifice. When Sati asks her father why there is no place reserved for Shiva, his answer repeats many of her earlier objections and ends by declaring:

> O goddess, your husband Shankara has all of these deficiencies, how could this inauspicious one receive a share in this auspicious [sacrifice]? This assembly at my sacrifice, my child, is for the deserving alone. I should not display the sacrifice to your inauspicious husband, O wife of Shiva, ascetics are not proper for a

> sacrifice. My child, I gave you to him only by fate, as the [fruition] of some evil deed [in my past]. (MPM 3.52–54)

These two speeches have similar content but a markedly different tone. Sati complains about their lifestyle and Shiva's unusual habits, but the epithets with which she addresses him clearly show that she considers him as the supreme god. Her father shows both his contempt for Shiva's lifestyle and his refusal to accept Shiva's lordship, which Sati cannot abide. When Sati hears Daksha's speech, "characterized by ridicule of her husband" (*bhartrnindatmakam*), she falls into the sacrificial fire, but she first "meditates in [her] heart on the feet of her husband, the auspicious Supreme Self" (MPM 3.56). Self-immolation is her strongest possible protest, and her last thoughts are fixed upon her husband as her Supreme Lord (in this, upholding the cultural ideal of a good Indian wife). In contrast, Daksha gains devotion to Shiva only after great suffering, and it is only after this that he is able to complete his sacrifice.

Aside from stressing devotion to Shiva, this story is also used to establish the Mayapuri region's sanctity. This purpose is clear from chapter 3's opening verse, in which Narada, the *mahatmya*'s interlocutor, inquires about the origin (*utpatti*) of this *tirtha*. This question lies dormant until the story's end, when Shiva, pleased by Daksha's hymn of praise, tells him to choose a boon:

> [Daksha said]: [Grant] that this [place] may become a crossing-place (*tirtha*) destroying great sins, such that merely seeing it frees one from sins such as brahminicide. May you dwell forever in this region, may the goddess quickly take birth again and marry you without delay.
>
> [Shiva said]: . . . It will happen exactly as you have requested. This region [will be] extremely holy, . . . [as that place] where through [the operation of] illusion (*maya*), Daksha realized all. Therefore this great region (*kshetra*) will be [known as] Mayakshetra. . . . I shall dwell in [this] region under the name of Daksha's Lord (Daksheshvara), just by seeing me one will acquire the eight supernatural powers (*siddhis*). O Daksha, those fools who visit *tirthas* but do not view [this image of] me, that [pilgrimage] will be utterly fruitless. . . . Those best among men who prostrate only one time [in worship] to Shiva Daksheshvara shall become equal to [Shiva's retainers such as] Nandi, Bhrngi, and so forth. . . . Thus, O Brahmin, I have told you the origin of the Maya region (Mayakshetra), one who hears it with devotion will attain a place in Shiva's realm. (MPM 5.76–81, 84–85, 91, 93)

One of Daksha's requests, and much of Shiva's reply, seek to establish the Mayapuri region as a place where ritual action brings enormous rewards; another clear goal is to connect the site's name to this story. The story emphasizes Shiva's "conscious" presence as Daksheshvara—that this is a place where he is attentive to his devotees. It further highlights the site's power by making worship there the prerequisite to obtain religious merit from pilgrimage; pilgrims who skip this place gain no "fruits" (*phal*) from their religious acts.[11] As noted previously, the text points to this story—and to the Kankhal site—as the ultimate source for Hardwar's holiness, and thus clearly tries to promote the holiness of both the temple and region.

This *mahatmya*'s praise of Hardwar is much more specific than in any other version, and not surprisingly, textual clues point to interpolations. One is that the new material comes at the story's beginning and end, neatly framing the well-known tale: the first verse inquires into region's origin, and the concluding passages tell about its merits. A more specific clue comes from comparing the MPM's ending with that found in the other accounts. Many versions end with Daksha's hymn to Shiva after Daksha has been brought back to life, and these hymns usually conclude with a *phalashruti* ("hearing the benefits")—"summing-up" verses that detail spiritual benefits.[12] In the MPM, Daksha's hymn to Shiva ends with a *phalashruti*—probably marking the end of the original text—after which Shiva immediately offers Daksha boons, without any narrative transition in between. This abrupt transition to new material indicates where the new scion has been imperfectly grafted onto the older stock.

Aside from establishing the region's holiness, Daksha's requests also address the story's unresolved issues. Daksha requests true devotion to Shiva and repents his evil actions toward both Shiva and Sati. Shiva graciously accepts Daksha's devotion and clearly states that he and the goddess will soon reunite. In the end, all conflicts have been harmoniously resolved, and the hearers are reminded of both the region's holiness and the benefits of hearing this story with faith. Since I infer that the MPM was written as a guidebook by the local brahmins, this last aspect could have powerfully impressed their listeners.

The Descent of the Ganges: Annihilation and Redemption

The other central mythic event associated with Hardwar is the Descent of the Ganges. Hindu reverence for the Ganges is widely known, and the story's central themes address abiding Hindu concerns. The general outline of the story is well known, and this version has been translated from a contemporary pamphlet:

> According to history and our religious books, King Sagar was a famous and powerful monarch of the solar line. He completed one hundred horse sacrifices, but when he released the dusky horse for the final sacrifice, Indra took the horse and tied it at Sage Kapila's ashram, while the sage was absorbed in meditation. Indra was afraid that his celestial throne would be snatched from him (because King Sagar had obtained so much religious merit by performing so many sacrifices). King Sagar sent his sixty thousand sons to search for the horse. After searching a long time, they arrived at Sage Kapila's ashram. Seeing the horse tied there, the sixty thousand princes thought that Sage Kapila had stolen the horse, and that when the sage saw them coming he had closed his eyes and seated himself (pretending to be in meditation). They spoke insulting words to the sage, and because of this he became angry and burned them [all] into ash.
>
> King Sagar's grandson Anshuman propitiated Sage Kapila, returned with the horse, and completed the sacrifice. Yet there was still the problem of releasing the sixty thousand princes who had been the objects of the sage's anger. When King Anshuman asked Sage Kapila how to release them, [Kapila] said that they would never be released until the Ganges descended from heaven and touched their ashes. King Anshuman labored tirelessly to bring the Ganges down to earth, and after him his son Dilip, but they were unsuccessful. King Dilip's son Bhagirath did austerities (*tapas*) by which the Ganges was pleased, and [she] agreed to come down to earth. At King Bhagirath's request Lord Shiva agreed to let the Ganges fall on his forehead, to cushion the shock of her descent from heaven; Shiva loosened a lock of his matted hair and released a stream of Ganges water onto the earth. In this way the Ganges descended to earth and King Sagar's sixty thousand sons were saved. Since Bhagirath brought the Ganges down to earth, one of her names is Bhagirathi. (A. Singh, 18–19)

Differing versions of this story appear in at least fifteen different classical Sanskrit texts, and the focus clearly shifts as the story develops.[13] The oldest versions are embedded in a genealogy of the solar kings, and here the main figure is King Sagar. In these early versions, four sons survive to carry on the line, and the narrative is so disjointed that it describes the birth of the sixty thousand sons only after they have been destroyed.[14] Later accounts tie up these loose ends to make a cleaner narrative and pay far greater attention to Bhagirath.

More important, these accounts stress the story's two essential themes: the genealogical concern for surviving through offspring and the soteriological concern to ensure ancestral well-being. These are still powerful concerns in modern India, and both stem from the desire to ensure felicity after death. Religious duty requires one to perform certain rites for one's ancestors, and having children ensures that these rites will continue.

Andreas Bock has created a detailed stemma laying out the relationship between these various accounts. This stemma posits the *Ramayana* (Ram.) as a major source for the later accounts, and both of these themes receive considerable attention in that text. The text begins by noting that Sagar "desired children, but he was childless" (Ram. 1.38.1). Sagar and his wives performed long austerities to get children and finally gained the boon that one wife would bear a single son who would carry on the lineage, and the other would bear 60,000 sons, who would all be killed. Yet this boon did not end the king's worries, for this single son was quite wicked—the *Ramayana* reports that he threw children in the Sarayu River and then laughed as they sank (1.38.20–21). This concern for progeny is less sharply articulated in the early versions of the story, where four of the sixty thousand sons survive. In this version, there is only one son, and a bad son at that!

The text's earliest versions report the death of the sixty thousand sons but mention no efforts to redeem them, or even the idea that they might need to be redeemed. In the *Ramayana* and the later accounts, this soteriological desire drives the family for three generations. The extreme example is Bhagirath, who leaves home to perform austerities even before he has children. When Brahma finally offers Bhagirath a boon, the latter's requests explicitly show the connection between redemption and progeny: "O lord, if you are pleased with me, if my austerities [will be] fruitful, by my [efforts] may all the sons of Sagar obtain [Ganges] water. And when the ashes of these great beings are touched by Ganges water, may they all immediately go to heaven. O god, I ask for offspring, let not my family come to an end! O god, this is my highest [wish] for the line of Ikshvaku" (Ram. 1.42.19–21).

There are several more obstacles before Bhagirath actually brings down the Ganges, but he never wavers in his resolve, and in their filial piety, Bhagirath and his ancestors are paradigms for ordinary people. Several accounts stress that people now have it easy—after all, they don't have to bring down the Ganges from heaven to ensure their ancestors' felicity, they merely have to go to the Ganges.[15] Other texts point out that Bhagirath brought down the Ganges not only for his own benefit but also for that of the entire world.[16]

Both themes tap into abiding Hindu concerns, and this is clearly one reason the story retains its power. Yet most versions of the story do not mention

Hardwar, and even though contemporary literature invariably cites this story as Hardwar's charter myth, the connection here seems much more tenuous than for the Daksha story. Despite this, several accounts attest that Hindus have connected the two for some time. The *Padma Purana*'s (P.) *Haridvaramahatmya* ("Greatness of Hardwar") is nothing more than the story of the descent of the Ganges, lifted almost verbatim from the *Shiva Purana*.[17] The compiler has added some opening verses identifying the story as the *Haridvaramahatmya* and ended with a dozen verses praising Hardwar's power to expunge one's sins. The only real surprise in the text comes when Shiva (the account's narrator) reveals that Hardwar's influence led him to be born there in a form of Vishnu (P. 5.21.21).

Another text identifying this myth with Hardwar is Anantabhatta's *Tirtharatnakara*, a work whose chapters are devoted to the praise of different *tirtha*s. The colophon page for one of these chapters—and the only page I found for this chapter—lists its title as the "Greatness of the Ganges and of Mayapuri" (*mayapurigangamahatmya*). The chapter text itself is *Naradiya Purana* (Nar.) 5.102–118, and it describes Bhagirath's ultimate success—Shiva grants him the Ganges, and his ancestors are saved from the terrors of hell. Both sources are much later than the original story—the *Tirtharatnakara* was written ca.1625–50,[18] whereas the *Padma Purana* dates from some time earlier—but both bear witness to the connection between Hardwar and this myth.

Both manuscript *mahatmya*s barely allude to this story, and this seems clearly intentional. In HDM 3, the sage Jahnu drank up the Ganges when she disturbed his meditation. The text locates this event at Brahmakund and describes Bhagirath persuading Jahnu to release the Ganges, but the story's focus is clearly on Jahnu. The MPM also largely ignores this story, although chapter 6 advances a rationale for associating it with Hardwar: "This very holy crossing-place arose with the coming of the Ganges. It is called Gangadvara ["Gate of the Ganges"]; simply remembering it destroys sin.… This place is called Gangadvara because the Ganges fell to earth here when King Bhagirath … brought the Ganges down from heaven. O Brahmin, the wise consider the regions north of Hardwar as heavenly, the regions other than that are earthly" (MPM, 6.1–4). According to this claim, since the region north of Hardwar is the land of the gods, the Ganges did not actually descend to earth until it reached Hardwar.[19] Yet the MPM says nothing more about this myth, undoubtedly because the immediately preceding chapters describe the Daksha story as Hardwar's charter myth, and the Daksha temple as Hardwar's most sacred site.

Why do the *mahatmya*s virtually ignore this story? The most probable answer is that highlighting it would have run against the authors' interests. These texts were written to promote specific sites in Hardwar and to channel

pilgrim traffic and patronage to them. Pilgrims coming to Hardwar would have certainly bathed in the Ganges, and though the river's sanctity would have needed no emphasis, at the same time that sanctity could not be restricted to Hardwar. The *mahatmya* writers thus gave the Ganges relatively little stress in their texts and instead focused on establishing and promoting Hardwar's unique sites.

Textual Reports—Ritual, Asceticism, *Mahatmya*

The first parts of this chapter have focused on two particular mythical stories associated with Hardwar: Daksha's sacrifice and the Descent of the Ganges. This section examines other references to Hardwar in the Epics and the *purana*s and the context in which these appear. Many such references are extremely brief—either a single line of text or inclusion in a catalogue of pilgrimage sites. The two major themes around which these references cluster are ritual action and asceticism—both of which are still important today. Several *purana*s have chapters or sections specifically devoted to Hardwar, and at least one of these is an important source for the subsequent manuscript *mahatmya*s, which the following sections examine at greater length.

Unsurprisingly, the primary ritual actions mentioned are the ones most commonly associated with *tirtha*s: bathing (*snana*), death rites (*shraddha*, *tarpana*, and *asthivisarjana*), and gift giving (*dana*).[20] Bathing is mentioned the most often, and Hardwar's religious identity is intimately connected with the presence and purifying qualities of the Ganges. Most *purana*s have a *mahatmya* of the Ganges, and these usually stress the benefits gained by bathing, although they often mention the merits from other actions, such as seeing it and meditating upon it. Although the Ganges is holy everywhere, Hardwar has been deemed particularly holy. A very common verse decrees: "The Ganges is everywhere easily accessible, [but] extraordinary in three places: at Gangadvara, at Prayaga, and at Gangasagara."[21] These three places are important transitional sites—where the Ganges leaves the mountains, joins with the Yamuna River, and merges the sea—and this verse affirms their heightened sanctity. In Hardwar itself, a common verse describes the five main bathing places as Gangadvara, Kushavarta, Bilvaka, Nila Parvata, and Kankhal.[22] Other texts, such as Nar. 4.40.28–36, mention the merits of bathing at different sites in Hardwar, as do the manuscript *mahatmya*s.

Hardwar is also a center for funereal rites, particularly *shraddha*, *tarpana*, and *asthivisarjana*. *Shraddha* feeds one's deceased ancestors, usually by feeding a group of brahmins representing them. *Tarpana* gives water to one's

ancestors; it is generally performed while bathing by cupping water in one's hands and then letting it flow through one's fingers. *Asthivisarjana* is the last of the death rites, in which ash and bone from a cremation pyre are immersed in a body of water, preferably the Ganges.

Shraddha and *tarpana* are prescribed rites at any pilgrimage place, and several texts either prescribe them at Hardwar or describe them as being performed there. The *Mahabharata* lists Hardwar as the place where Bhishma performed *tarpana* for his ancestors (MHB 3.80.14) and where Yudhishthira performed the last rites for Kunti, Dhrtarashtra, and Gandhari (MHB 15.47.14–20). Various *purana*s prescribe different spots in the region as suitable for *shraddha*,[23] and the MPM not only prescribes it but also warns of the perils of neglecting it: "A man who does not [perform] *shraddha* has no increase in progeny, and when he dies he goes to hell. . . . If a man comes to a *tirtha* and does not perform a *shraddha*, his ritual actions at the *tirtha* are all in vain, as is his life" (MPM 10.15–16). These texts are largely silent on the need to do *tarpana*, and this difference certainly reflects patronage concerns—a *shraddha* entails feeding a group of brahmins, whereas *tarpana* is done on one's own while bathing. Since the text compilers were almost certainly brahmins, they had more to lose if the *shraddha* was omitted.

Whereas *shraddha* and *tarpana* are "standard" pilgrimage rites, *asthivisarjana* is the last of the death rites and performed only once. This practice is attested by the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang and also mentioned in *Padma Purana* 5.217—which describes how two murdered men attained Vishnu's realm when their ashes were thrown into the Ganges at Hardwar—but the charter myth for this practice is clearly the Descent of the Ganges. Several versions of this story describe the benefits that this rite brings to one's ancestors,[24] and the concerns addressed by this rite mirror those in the Ganges myth. Bhagirath brought the Ganges to his ancestors, and since then, people have brought their ancestors to the Ganges, in each case with the same hope—that the sacred river's touch would convey them to heaven. Hardwar is an important site for this rite, drawing people from all over North India, and historical records attest that this has been true for at least several centuries.

The final significant religious action is gift giving (*dana*), which receives fulsome praise in virtually every text. Many sources stress the merits of gift giving, but it is most explicitly developed in two chapters in the MPM.[25] Chapter 10 prescribes rules (*vidhi*) for rituals at Hardwar: it devotes two verses to bathing, eight to *shraddha*, and then the rest of that chapter and all of the next to gift giving, from which the text writers stood to receive the most tangible benefits. These two chapters especially praise the gift of a cow (*godanam*) and even claim that cows maintain the universe—the ghee from their milk is used in sacrifices,

and these sacrifices bring the rain that produces food (MPM 10.28–30). As chapter 4 discusses in greater detail, this emphasis on gift giving is still deeply entrenched in modern Hardwar: from *annakshetra*s (charitable organizations that feed the poor by collecting donations), to people collecting money for building construction and renovation, to beggars eager to promote a good deed, to gifts to local brahmins themselves. The sales pitch gets more sophisticated as the amount increases, but everyone is essentially seeking tangible material goods in exchange for intangible religious merit.

Besides commending Hardwar as a place for ritual action, these texts also describe it as a *tapobhumi*, an undeveloped region where ascetics could live in peace and quiet. The *Mahabharata* and other texts list sages such as Bharadvaja, Agastya, Jayadratha, Pulastya, and Narada as doing *tapas* at Hardwar; in these cases, Hardwar serves as a site for their ascetic practice.[26] This attribution continues in the *mahatmya*s, although these latter texts tend to emphasize the holiness of the site itself. In the *Varaha Purana*'s Kubjamraka *mahatmya*, the sage Raibhya's reward for his severe austerities is a vision of Vishnu in the form of a bent mango tree (*kubja-amra*, hence the place name).[27] At Raibhya's request, Vishnu proclaims Kubjamraka a holy spot and then describes the religious merit to be obtained there.

This same theme appears several times in the HDM and the MPM. The former associates the holiness of three bathing sites—Suryakund ("the sun's pool"), Ramakund, and Brahmakund—with the *tapas* done by Surya, Rama, and Jahnu, respectively.[28] The stories in the MPM have completely different content, but the theme remains the same. The charter myth for the second half of the MPM is the story of Raibhya, which is lifted directly from the *Varaha Purana*. Finally, the MPM's closing chapter describes Rama and Lakshmana doing penance to atone for killing Ravana and Meghanada, and by this action establishing the region around Lakshman Jhula in Rishikesh as a holy place.

Hardwar is no longer a peaceful ascetics' grove, but this remains an important part of its identity. According to some residents, Hardwar's status as a *tapobhumi* is why meat, eggs, and liquor are prohibited there. Ascetics still have a strong presence in Hardwar, and some of these ascetic "orders" are not only extremely wealthy but also influential in local politics. It seems that these orders have a long history of influence because they control many of Hardwar's oldest and most important sites—Bilvakeshvar, Daksheshvar, Maya Devi, and Bhairav Akhara. Aside from the established orders, many "unaffiliated" *sadhu*s live in and around Hardwar, both because it is a holy place and because patronage is readily available. Their presence still shapes Hardwar's religious atmosphere, even though the reality of ascetic life does not always conform to the ideal, as chapters 4 and 6 explore in greater detail.

Although references to Hardwar in the published *purana*s are usually quite brief, in several cases, longer texts specifically proclaim its greatness ("*mahatmya*")—a trend continued by the manuscript *mahatmya*s, which are examined in greater detail later. The most detailed example comes from the *Naradiya Purana*, the only published *purana* with an entire chapter devoted to Hardwar.[29] Unlike earlier texts, this one gives specific instructions regarding times, places, and ritual actions. It begins and ends with a statement on the benefits of reading or listening to the text, which is said to destroy sin and confer religious benefits. These verses provide an introduction and conclusion to frame the text as a whole.

The *mahatmya* begins by naming Hardwar as the place where the Ganges finally came to earth, highlighting Hardwar's connection with the Ganges. Verses 5–19 briefly recount the Daksha story and the sites associated with it, and this is followed by a "tour" (verses 20–43) of other local sites: Haripada, Triganga, Kankhal, Jahnutirtha, Kotitirtha, Saptaganga, Avarta, Kapilahrada, Nagaraja, Lalitaka, Shantanu, and Bhimasthala. None of these gets more than a few verses, but such specific description shows that the region had been divided into discrete sites, and many of these places can still be identified.[30] This *mahatmya* also mentions the rites to be performed at each site, which are largely the standard rites: bathing, fasting, *shraddha*, *tarpana*, and gift giving, especially to brahmins.[31] It also recommends Satikund and Triganga as appropriate places for religious suicide, a surprisingly common textual motif that was far more rarely carried out.[32]

In addition to naming specific places, the *mahatmya* also designates auspicious times. It begins by specifying three different astronomical conjunctions (*yoga*)—Varuni, Mahavaruni, and Mahamahavaruni.[33] Other auspicious times are a *sankranti* (solar/planetary transition in the zodiac), a new moon, the anniversary of the first day of a cosmic age, and a conjunction called *vyatipata*.[34] The final auspicious time is when Jupiter is in Aquarius and the sun is in Aries—the precise conjunction for Hardwar's Kumbha Mela, although the text does not use this name. In specifically naming particular sites and times, the *Naradiya Purana* foreshadows the later manuscript *mahatmya*s.

The other published *mahatmya* is *Varaha Purana* (Var.) 126. This is an important source for the manuscript *mahatmya*s but as vague as the *Naradiya Purana* is detailed. This *mahatmya* praises a place called Kubjamraka, whose location has never been clearly fixed. Kane (HOD 4.771–72) believes it is in or near Hardwar, and several verses seem to support this judgment.[35] Atkinson's *Himalayan Gazetteer* gives no location for Kubjamraka but locates some of its subsites in the former Tehri princely state (which partly corresponds to the modern Tehri District, north of Rishikesh).[36] Based on this, some people have

identified Kubjamraka with Rishikesh, but Dey notes that this claim is untenable, since Var. 146 is a *mahatmya* for Rishikesh.[37] Such consistently vague textual references and the inability to locate the site today lead me to believe that Kubjamraka was never an actual place.

Varaha 126 falls into three discrete parts: the charter myth recounting the sage Raibhya's austerities, a list of Kubjamraka's *tirtha*s, and an extended narrative only peripherally associated with Kubjamraka. As related before, the charter myth describes how Raibhya performed harsh austerities at Gangadvara—the only place where a definite place name appears—and received a vision of Vishnu in a mango tree that was bent (*kubja*) under his weight. This story leads into the list of Kujamraka's *tirtha*s; the text briefly describes each site and the rituals to be performed there. These *tirtha*s are not mentioned in any other text, they cannot be matched with concrete sites, and their very names—such as Agnitirtha, Vayutirtha, and Manasatirtha—have no clear referents outside the text. The *mahatmya*'s final part—fully half the text—recounts how a snake and a mongoose killed each other at Kubjamraka, were reborn as a prince and princess, and later married. The story underlines Kubjamraka's sanctity—illustrating the benefits from dying there—but is otherwise unconnected to it. This phenomenon of a tale in which the story line is only loosely associated with the *tirtha* is also found in both manuscript *mahatmya*s.

The Kubjamraka *mahatmya* appears in both manuscript traditions, although it appears in only one manuscript of the HDM, where it is an obvious interpolation.[38] It is quite different for the MPM, in which the final eight chapters—roughly a third of the text—have chapter titles containing the word Kubjamraka. Much of this material is drawn from the *Varaha Purana*, but the MPM's compilers have carefully grafted the *mahatmya* onto their text to make the addition less visible. Only a few verses from the *Varaha Purana* appear in the MPM, but the latter's structure and themes clearly point to the *Varaha Purana* as the ultimate source. For example, the MPM's account closely follows the outlines of the Raibhya story, but the only identical verse comes when Raibhya requests that Vishnu dwell in Kubjamraka.[39] The MPM brackets this request with new material of its own: MPM 16.15–23 gives Raibhya's eulogium to Vishnu, and MPM 16.36–42 lauds Kubjamraka's greatness and the benefits from ritual action there. The chapter ends with entirely new text detailing Vishnu's presence at Kubjamraka in different cosmic ages.[40]

Text from the *Varaha Purana* also appears later in the MPM, although again reworked by the compilers. Chapters 19–21 are based on the list of *tirtha*s in Var. 126.24–102. The MPM does not reproduce the verses but names the same *tirtha*s in the same order. The MPM sometimes expands the source text—MPM 20 is devoted entirely to Agnitirtha, which gets only a few verses in the

Varaha Purana—but chapter 21 continues without missing a site. This continues until MPM 21.24, where the text takes up its final theme, the story of Rama and Lakshmana's residence at Kubjamraka. The only *tirtha* treated out of sequence here is Mayatirtha, since the question of its origin provides the introduction to MPM 17–18. These two chapters are based on *Varaha Purana* 125, which describes how the ascetic Somasharma experienced Vishnu's *maya*.[41] In both cases, the MPM's compilers successfully wove the *Varaha Purana*'s text into their own narrative and broke up the material to conceal the source text.

Despite Kubjamraka's uncertain location, the HDM and the MPM have both identified it with Hardwar and integrated this *mahatmya* in their accounts. This was clumsy and obvious in the HDM and occurs in only one manuscript, albeit the oldest. The MPM is much more sophisticated. It uses more of the *purana*'s text and rearranges the original text to give a longer and more coherent account. We shall now focus more specifically on these manuscripts, on their content, and on their authors and purpose.

The *Haridvaramahatmya*

The *Haridvaramahatmya* (HDM) is by far the earlier of the two manuscript *mahatmya*s, and its general tone and portrayal of Hardwar are very different than in the MPM.[42] This section examines five manuscripts from Pune—four at the Bhandarkar Institute (P1–P4) and the fifth at Mandlik Library of Fergusson College (P5). The earliest manuscripts are from the early seventeenth century—P1 is dated *samvat* 1673 (1616 CE), and P2 *samvat* 1694 (1637 CE)—but the text clearly predates these manuscripts, and one primary reason for this text's importance is that it is one of the only sources of any kind from that era.[43] All the manuscripts have eight chapters, and their text is virtually identical. Based on these considerations, P1 and P2 seem to be the most authoritative of these texts; they are not only the oldest but also P3 and P4 were clearly copied from P2.

The HDM restricts itself to a notably smaller geographical area than the later MPM, and most sites are near the center of modern Hardwar. The first three chapters largely focus on the charter myths for four sacred pools (*kund*s) and the benefits gained by bathing in them. Bhimakund (modern Bhim Ghoda) appeared when Bhima's knee touched the earth as he struggled in vain to lift Hanuman's tail; a bath there will give one the strength of Bhima. The sun god dug Suryakund ("Sun's pool") to appease his wife's burning thirst; a bath there bestows physical, mental, and spiritual illumination. During his exile from Ayodhya, Rama excavated Ramakund and did *tapas* there. The final pool is Brahmakund (now Har-ki-Pairi), which is tied to the sage Jahnu's harsh

austerities at that place. The text later highlights Jahnu's power by describing how he drank up the Ganges; this story is associated with nearby Kushavarta.

Brahmakund is modern Hardwar's ritual center and the only one of these four that is still important. One factor contributing to this has undoubtedly been the changes in Brahmakund itself, which are discussed in chapter 3. Bhima Kund is the modern Bhim Ghoda; its location near the main road ensures some pilgrim traffic, but its importance seems to have rapidly declined in the recent past; as late as 1916, British government documents described its holiness as second only to Brahmakund (HMI Oct. 1916: 2).[44] Local guidebooks still mention Suryakund, which is a natural pool in a streambed behind the Mansa Devi temple, but it is no longer an active site. Ramakund has completely disappeared—it is not mentioned in any guidebook, and I was unable to find it. Yet in 1808, Raper reported large pilgrim crowds not only at Ramakund, which he describes as upstream from Suryakund, but also at several other *kund*s above it.[45] These sites are now well off the beaten track and Suryakund is the only one that has not completely disappeared.

Chapter 4 focuses on Bilvakeshvar, which still has an active and important Shiva temple.[46] Bilvakeshvar's contemporary charter describes it as the place where Shiva revealed himself to his future bride Parvati, whereas the *mahatmya* describes Shiva as meeting—and marrying—a young woman named Bilvaka, through which he became "Bilvaka's Lord" (Bilvakeshvar).[47] The *mahatmya* does not mention Parvati, and it seems that the current charter has retained the *mahatmya*'s core—Shiva meeting and marrying a beautiful woman—but changed her identity from Bilvaka to Parvati. Since Bilvaka is now unknown, she is probably the story's original figure.[48]

The manuscript's latter half (chapters 5–8) is less directly tied to concrete places. The first part of chapter 5, HDM 5.1–15, describes Kankhal and Nila Parvat, and the rest of the chapter is supposedly devoted to Mayapuri, but there is little attention to concrete sites.[49] Chapter 6 tells the story of Ajamila, a sinful brahmin whose sole redeeming quality was his love for his son Narayana, whose name he repeated as he lay dying. Since Narayana is also a name of Vishnu, this invocation spurred Vishnu's grace to rescue Ajamila from his well-deserved punishment at the hands of Yama (Death). The original tale's core message is the power of the Divine Name, which the *mahatmya* retains, but the text adds new material to stress Hardwar's holiness.[50] The seventh chapter begins by briefly describing sites in Hardwar,[51] but mostly it recounts the sage Markandeya's vision of Krishna sitting at the base of the *akshaya vata*, the "undying fig-tree," which is the only object to survive the cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*). The text minutely describes Krishna and the *vata* tree, but beyond setting the story in Hardwar, pays no attention to any sites there.

The final chapter begins by describing Hardwar's *kshetrapala* (lit., "field-protector," but more generally a guardian deity) Bhairava: his attributes, his dress, his motions, his gestures, and the fury of his *tandava* dance. Although Bhairava is a fairly common *kshetrapala*, this reference probably refers to the Hardwar Bhairava temple, which Cunningham names as one of the region's oldest (1871: 233). The chapter concludes with prescriptions for worshipping Bhairava, as well as the surprising statement that Hari, Brahma, Shiva, and Bhairava are all forms of Vishnu, who have come to destroy evil and to protect the good. Since the text emphatically states that Bhairava must be worshipped in Hardwar, this identification is possibly a way to incorporate these deities into a framework more amenable to Vaishnava pilgrims.

A closer look at the text clearly shows that it is a composite work. The clearest evidence is a shift in the text's name—chapters 1 through 4 call it the *Haridvaramahatmya*, whereas chapters 5 through 8 call it the *Mayapurimahatmya* (although to avoid confusion with the later *Mayapurimahatmya*, I refer to this text only as the *Haridvaramahatmya*). From a literary standpoint, the second half is far more complex—almost a third of the verses are written in eleven different long, "ornamental" meters, whereas the first half has only five such meters, and they make up only an eighth of the text.[52]

Although the text clearly seeks to reinforce Hardwar's sanctity, the two halves do this in different ways. The first half is strongly focused on sacred places—that is, in providing a mythic charter to establish the sanctity of particular spots and in listing the ritual actions and potential benefits associated with those spots. Furthermore, all of these places are very close to Har-ki-Pairi. The second half mentions specific places—some of them previously mentioned in the first part, another sign of a composite text—but it puts far greater emphasis on telling stories. These stories largely focus on Vishnu's divine activity, which is loosely tied to places in the region. Finally, the second half is geographically centered downstream from Har-ki-Pairi, closer to modern Mayapur and Kankhal. Both parts generally describe spatial relationships between different places correctly, which indicates an on-the-ground familiarity with Hardwar, and the entire area is far smaller than in the MPM.[53] Surprisingly, the text is far less specific in fixing sacred times. Two verses prescribe rites for particular lunar days, but the only annual festival mentioned is Ganga Dashahara, the day when the Ganges descended to earth (HDM 6.45).[54] Since other contemporary sources mention large spring festivals, it is surprising that these are not mentioned.[55]

What then can one infer about the authors and how the text was compiled? The text's two halves clearly attest to at least two authors and perhaps one or more compilers as well.[56] The first four chapters are almost certainly older.

They are clearly focused on local sites, the language and style are less ornate, and the entire text seems to be an original composition—that is, the verses appear nowhere else. The second half was written by a highly skilled writer—based on the liberal use of long and difficult meters—but much of this part retells stories drawn from the *purana*s rather than written from scratch. A final piece of evidence for the primacy of the first part is that the name Hardwar occurs evenly through the entire text, whereas the name Mayapur appears only once in the first half—hinting that the second half (which the chapter titles identify as the *Mayapurimahatmya*) was grafted on later.

The *mahatmya*'s style attests to its writers' literary skill, but important additional evidence comes from the text's general tone. Although the text ascribes benefits to particular ritual actions, the dominant emphasis is on consistent, committed religious practice. The charter myths for Suryakund, Ramakund, and Brahmakund all emphasize the ascetic feats that created the sites, but they also stress that people seeking benefits at these places must be equally committed. For example, HDM 1.54 states that beholding the rising sun at Suryakund destroys all wretchedness and bestows good health, but to gain these things, one must first obtain a true guru and then worship using that guru's mantra. Such spiritual benefits are thus the fruit of a much longer process. Similarly, HDM 5.43–54 articulates concerns in describing morning rituals: rising before dawn, elimination, bathing, ornamentation, *pranayama* ("control of the vital breaths"), *sankalpa* ("statement of purpose"), remembering Vishnu, *tarpana*, and oblations to the sun and the dawn. Yet the first verse sets the tone for all of these rituals: "Having come into this world, one should perform ritual action, *maya* (illusion) does not bind him. Through discerning action, a wise man moves himself to that highest goal (HDM 5.43)." This hardly describes a quick fix but rather a committed spiritual regimen.[57]

The most specific passages stressing spiritual practice and liberation as the highest goal come at the beginning of chapter 3:

> As a lamp set in a pot with many holes shines forth manifoldly, even so this infinite Self (*atma*) shines forth in this many-sheathed multiform body. Though the Self is unborn, it [appears] to take birth, as the same lamp [casts a different pattern when] in another vessel (with a different pattern of holes). . . . Hear me, O Sage! Though the body is subject to destruction, everything is done on its behalf; wife, sons, wealth, friends, these are all [ultimately] illusory, not real. One should travel toward that highest goal; a man troubled by desires for sons and wealth is nothing but a beast pretending to [fulfill] human duty. Salvific knowledge is extraordinarily difficult to obtain, [but] one

> is freed from duality by knowing that pure, unqualified Brahman. Therefore this is called knowledge, the one who knows this attains [the highest] state. (HDM 3.1–2, 4–6)

This passage calls for serious spiritual practice, and such direct speech suggests that the author is speaking directly to the reader. The text has no connection with Hardwar, and close reading clearly reveals that it is interpolated. This interpolation appears between two stories of the sage Jahnu—chapter 2 recounts his ascetic practice (*tapas*) at Brahmakund, and chapter 3 describes him swallowing the Ganges. The interpolated block fits neatly into the narrative: after Brahma appears to grant boons to Jahnu, he gives Jahnu instruction on the Ultimate Reality, Brahman (2.32–35). Immediately after this comes the passage just translated that stresses the search for liberation, and this progression seems fairly natural until Jahnu suddenly reappears in verse 9 of chapter 3. Aside from the sudden change in topic, other textual clues clearly point to an interpolation: HDM 2.29 and 3.9 both state that Brahma appeared to Jahnu because of the latter's *tapas* at Brahmakund, and HDM 3.9 adds that this is why the place is named Brahmakund. Why does the text have two nearly identical verses? The first verse leads into the interpolation, and the second returns to the original story, reminding readers where the tale left off.

Further evidence for interpolation comes from chapter 2's final verse, which comes between the passage describing *brahman* as the ultimate reality and the passage stressing the need to search for it: "The Ganges, pleased by the sound of [her] waves like the clamor of drums and bells, with whirlpools [showing] her great modesty, went to the sea" (HDM 2.36). This is a non sequitur because the Ganges does not reappear until HDM 3.15, where one finds the story of Jahnu swallowing the Ganges, and this verse's position here is a clear sign that the text has been altered.

Although the *mahatmya* stresses the importance of spiritual discipline, it shows little interest in brahmins or brahmin concerns. The text's major figures are either ascetics or they are householders living like ascetics: Surya, Rama, Jahnu, Bilvaka's father Sudharma, and Markandeya. The only prominent brahmin is the sinful Ajamila, who is hardly a good role model. Unlike the MPM, the HDM does not stress religious rites in which local Brahmins had clear vested interests, such as *shraddha* and gift giving. Although HDM 3.30 mentions gift giving at Brahmakund, this is part of a formulaic phrase. The only other instance comes in HDM 2.23, which prescribes feeding a meal of roots, tubers, and fruits at Ramakund to any worthy person—brahmin, ascetic, or *brahmacharin* (student). Not only is this a humble "ascetic" meal but also the text mentions groups other than brahmins as appropriate recipients.

Based on the writers' erudition, the text's emphasis on asceticism and rigorous practice, and its seeming indifference to brahmins and brahmin concerns, I suspect that it was written and compiled by the Dashanami *sanyasi*s, an ascetic order devoted to Shiva supposedly founded by the eighth-century philosopher Shankaracharya. Colophons in the two earliest manuscripts name the copyists as Achint Gir and Vidavidyananda Gaja—the first clearly a member of the Giri order (one of the ten Dashanami subgroups), and the second having the "Ananda" suffix also associated with Dashanami ascetics. Although the Dashanamis worship the god Shiva, the text shows no consistent sectarian bias. Many different deities appear in the text, and much of the text is devoted to Vishnu and his avatars.[58] Despite this broad scope, important clues for the writers' identity can be found by examining questions of audience and motive.

The earliest manuscript (1616 CE) dates from the reign of the Mughul emperor Jahangir, and an earlier manuscript—suggested by the earliest text's obvious interpolation—could have been composed in Akbar's era. Both periods were prosperous and politically stable, and even though Jahangir is portrayed as a more orthodox Muslim than Akbar, he did not interfere with Hindu religious practices.[59] Given a period in which travel was relatively safe and the official climate relatively benign, it is not surprising that travelers such as the Englishman Tom Coryat report pilgrims flocking to Hardwar. I suspect that this growing traffic prompted the *mahatmya*'s composition, to document the greatness of the region. Furthermore, the text's nonsectarian perspective may have been a conscious attempt to appeal to pilgrims from many different backgrounds.

Yet this text does not simply disseminate information; it also channels pilgrim traffic. The text favors ascetics and asceticism, it ignores rites associated with brahmins, and it emphasizes worship at pools and temples: Suryakund, Ramakund, Bilvakeshvar, Brahmakund, Kankhal, Maya's temple, and Bhairava's temple. The only mandatory rite is for pilgrims to worship at the Bhairava temple; verse 8.16 states that one who does not worship Bhairava loses all the merit from daily rites and half the merit from the pilgrimage. If one accepts that the *mahatmya*'s "Maya" and "Bhairava" refer to the Maya Devi and Bhairava temples, the *mahatmya* would have been directing people to four sites historically controlled by the Dashanami *sanyasi*s: Bhairav Akhara, Maya Devi, the Daksheshvar temple in Kankhal, and Bilvakeshvar. Perhaps the Dashanamis did not control these sites in the seventeenth century, but given their power and local influence, it seems far more likely that they did—and history clearly shows that they were willing to use force to retain such privileges.[60]

This text channels pilgrim traffic to sites that Dashanami *sanyasi*s almost certainly controlled. It also diverts them to Ramakund and Suryakund, forest

sites where ascetics could have lived, although Raper (1808) reports that brahmins administered these sites (1979: 458).[61] These pilgrims would have been a source of offerings, alms, and other economic opportunities. Even though parts of the *mahatmya* could have been written by an "unaffiliated" individual ascetic—or by a learned layperson—neither of these would have had the resources to control pilgrim traffic at these sites and thus reap its benefits. Given the parameters of asceticism, learning, and a strong institutional presence, the most likely choice is the Dashanami *sanyasi*s, who still control many of these sites today.

The *Mayapurimahatmya*

The *Mayapurimahatmya* (MPM) is much longer and far more specific than the HDM, and it was composed about two centuries later. The text tends to be narrative rather than poetic, and it seems to have been written as a guidebook for the local brahmins, whose concerns and prestige it clearly upholds. It has been published at least twice, and this has helped it to remain an important source for current writers—unlike the HDM, which is completely unknown. Hardwar's *panda*s still refer to it while serving their pilgrim clients, and thus the text still upholds its original purpose.

Two of the six extant manuscripts are undated, and the four dated manuscripts fall in the brief interval between 1803 and 1829. Five of these manuscripts are clearly related, but they break into two distinct groups.[62] In one group are the Bikaner (Bik.) and Ujjain (U.) manuscripts, which are clearly related to each other and shorter than the other three. The Ujjain manuscript is undated, but the Bikaner manuscript apparently preserves an earlier version of the text, because it uses nonstandard spelling and grammar that are corrected in the Ujjain manuscript. The second group has the Calcutta (C), Jalalabad (J), and one of the Benares manuscripts (B1), which share twenty-six verses that are not found in the Bikaner and Ujjain manuscripts. These verses are often inserted in natural places for interpolation, such as a hymn of praise or a change of speaker. The second Benares manuscript (B2) has the same outline as the others, but the text is much longer and clearly different.[63] Even though it was copied later than some of the other manuscripts, it seems that the Bikaner manuscript preserves the earliest form of the text: it is the shortest manuscript, the text is the least polished, and it shows affinity with all the other manuscripts.

In 1906, the MPM was published by Venkateshvara Press as the last part of the *Kedarakhand*, a *mahatmya* for Garwhal's pilgrim sites, and in 1938, the MPM was published in its own right by Naval Kishore Press, Lucknow. Both

editions clearly follow the B1/C/J manuscript tradition, although the published texts add extra verses of their own and tend to use more standard grammatical forms.[64] The published texts and manuscripts both claim that this text comes from the *Kedarakhand* in the *Skanda Purana*, but the text does not appear in published *Skanda Purana* editions.[65] The *mahatmya*'s most important source is actually the *Varaha Purana*, which is the basis for chapters 16–21. As mentioned in the discussion of the Daksha story, the *mahatmya*'s version of this tale shows the stamp of the *Shiva, Skanda, and Bhagavata Purana*s, but the influence here is much less obvious. The rest of the text seems to be an original composition, and the stories appear nowhere else.

The MPM is plainly a composite document, and even a cursory examination reveals its constituent parts. The first two chapters are introductory. Chapter 1 gives the frame story for the entire text and praises the *Kedarakhand* as the holiest region on earth.[66] Chapter 2 lists specific *tirtha*s in the Mayapuri region—which includes sites from Hardwar to Rishikesh.[67] Chapters 3–5 recount the region's charter myth, which the *mahatmya* identifies as the story of Shiva, Sati, and Daksha. As discussed earlier, the *mahatmya*'s major divergence from other versions of this story comes at the story's end, when the *mahatmya* adds the passage praising Shiva as Daksheshvara. This addition establishes a well-known story as the region's charter myth and assures pilgrims of the region's holiness.

Chapters 6–9 and 12–14 ostensibly describe well-known Hardwar sites: Nila Parvat, Bilvakeshvar, Virabhadreshvar, Kankhal, Kushavarta, and Vishnu Ghat.[68] Although some of these chapters are very long, they reveal little about the sites themselves, since most of the text is padded with extraneous material.[69] The only chapter with no filler is MPM 12, which relates Kushavarta's charter myth and describes the benefits of ritual action there. This chapter is only eleven verses, about the length the others would have been without the extra material.

Chapters 10 and 11 are a separate block of text inserted into this catalogue of sites. They are clearly discontinuous with the preceding and following text and support the interests of the *mahatmya*'s brahmin compilers. These two chapters stress performing pilgrimage rites, particularly *shraddha* and gift giving. As mentioned earlier, both of these rites had clear benefits for local brahmins: at a *shraddha*, they were fed as the representatives of the ancestors, and they also received the gifts in question. Chapter 10 begins with a few verses about bathing, gives a few verses prescribing *shraddha*, and then praises gift giving for the rest of the chapter. It particularly lauds the gift of a cow, and describes how an extremely sinful merchant went to heaven after donating a cow on a drunken whim. Such a mechanistic picture of religious merit would

plainly serve the persons receiving these gifts, the brahmins. Chapter 11 also stresses the merits of gift giving but begins by talking about Raja Shveta, through whose ascetic practice Brahmakund was established. After claiming his boon from Lord Brahma, Shveta asks the sage Vashishtha about gift giving, and the rest of the chapter is devoted to this. These two chapters are an obvious insertion amid this catalogue of sacred sites, and this shows the *mahatmya*'s bias toward brahmin concerns.

Another list of *tirtha*s is in MPM 15, and only a few of them can be identified.[70] This is the third chapter that is primarily a list of *tirtha*s, and it seems that these chapters help to connect the text's differing parts. Chapter 2 serves as a table of contents and also mediates between the first chapter's broad outline and the later chapters' specific accounts. The list in chapter 8 fills out that chapter beyond the few verses devoted to Virabhadreshvar. The list in chapter 15 bridges the text's two halves—the first half devoted to Hardwar and the second to Kubjamraka, which the *mahatmya* identifies with Rishikesh.[71] Kubjamraka is the last *tirtha* mentioned in MPM 15, and thus this provides a smooth transition to the next part.

In this second half, MPM 16–21.26 come directly from the *Varaha Purana*, as discussed earlier at greater length. Chapter 16 follows Var. 126.1–21 in telling the story of Raibhya, the story of Vishnu's *maya* in Var. 125 is related in MPM 17–18, and MPM 19–21.26 name Kubjamraka's sub-*tirtha*s as described in Var. 126.22–102. This last list leads into the text's final section, which describes Rama and Lakshmana's residence at Kubjamraka and the holy spots established by their ascetic practice there. Chapter 21 ends with a condensed version of the *Ramayana*, which sets the stage for the following chapters. Chapter 23 names the *tirtha*s established by Rama and Laksmana's ascetic practice: Laksmanesvara, Laksmanakund, Munikund, Indrakund, Vayukund, Nandikund, Dharmadhara, Mayapuri, and Suryakund. The last two are real places, but they are in Hardwar; the others are not readily identifiable, if they actually exist.[72]

The most interesting section of this text is chapter 22, which explains why Rama and Lakshmana had to perform *tapas* at Kubjamraka. The end of chapter 21 describes Lakshmana as being afflicted by a deadly disease after returning to Ayodhya, for which their teacher Vashishtha prescribed ascetic practice at Kubjamraka as the cure.[73] Vashishtha explains that this disease was the punishment for killing Ravana and Meghanada, who despite being evil were also brahmins, and thus Rama and Lakshmana must expiate the sin of brahminicide. The entire text of chapter 22 highlights brahmin sanctity:

> O High-Minded Mighty Rama, hear the greatness (*mahatmya*) of brahmins, which destroys sin and removes fear and terror.

> A brahmin is a living image of Vishnu, the highest Lord. For this reason, O High-minded One, they are called the gods on earth; upon seeing one a host of sins are immediately destroyed. Wherever a brahmin stays, all the *tirtha*s of the earth are there forever. They should be fed whatever they want by whatever effort; one should give to brahmins anything that is difficult to obtain. One's ancestors are saved by association with brahmins, by worshipping brahmins, and by satisfying brahmins. (MPM 22.1–5)

This rhetoric persists throughout the chapter, punctuated by statements such as "Even if he is not learned, a brahmin should never be slighted, for learned or not, a brahmin is the body of the Lord" (MPM 22.18).

Such passages clearly reveal the text's compilers. On one hand, the text shows great concern for brahmin prestige (MPM 22), and it stresses *shraddha* and gift giving, the rites from which brahmins gained clear benefits (MPM 10–11). On the other, the text catalogues local sites and their associated stories to serve as a guidebook for the Hardwar region. Based on this, the MPM clearly seems to have been written as a reference work and an "advertisement" for the local brahmins serving the pilgrim trade, and this means that the text is prescriptive rather than descriptive. The dire warnings against omitting *shraddha* make one suspect that such omission was a real concern, whereas the hyperbolic declarations of brahmin sanctity may have been intended to counteract pejorative images of *tirtha* brahmins, who then as now have been characterized as poorly educated, avaricious, and parasitic.[74]

The historical context for its composition supports the idea that the text was a reference work for the pilgrim trade. The earliest manuscript was copied in 1803, and the other dated manuscripts are clustered in the next fifteen years, which suggests that the *mahatmya* was composed about that time.[75] Although the Hardwar region had been violent and unsettled for most of the eighteenth century, with constant conflict between Sikhs, Rohilla Afghans, and Marathas, it became much more stable after the Maratha annexation in 1789.[76] One clear sign of this stability was the growing importance of Hardwar's annual fair. This fair was a mid-April religious festival drawing large pilgrim crowds for the holy bath, but for at least two generations, it was also north India's largest marketplace, through which the trade goods from the north and west funneled into the Ganges Valley. This increased trade had profound affects on Hardwar, which chapter 3 discusses in far greater detail.

At the cusp of the nineteenth century, at least three different factors would have stimulated pilgrimage to Hardwar: Maratha religious patronage, a more

stable social climate, and the fair's economic attractions.[77] Accounts from the time bear witness to large crowds, and this trend continued after the advent of British rule in 1803. The text's internal evidence leads me to infer that it was written to service this pilgrim surge.[78]

A key word in the previous sentence is "service." After all, a journey to Hardwar would have expensive, difficult, and sometimes dangerous. Rational people would not have undertaken this without the prospect of obtaining benefits, which they gained both from the *panda*s (pilgrim guides) and from the text. *Panda*s are local brahmins who have the hereditary right to service the pilgrim trade. Although often dismissed as parasitic, they have clear responsibilities to their pilgrim clients, and chapter 5 examines this group in greater detail. The *panda*s would have housed, fed, and guided pilgrims during their stay in Hardwar, and the *panda*s would arrange for any rituals the pilgrims wished to perform, for which the *panda*s would receive fees and gifts. So even though wealth flowed mainly from pilgrims to *panda*s, the pilgrims would have received important and tangible benefits in return.

The text would have provided further intangible benefits, by assuring pilgrims that their pious actions would bear fruit. The *mahatmya*'s stories not only describe the local sites but also stress the religious merit generated by their sanctity. The stories about Nila Parvat, Bilvakeshvar, and Kankhal all describe how their sanctity instantly reformed hardened sinners. Another tale tells how a cart-driving *shudra* (a low-status group) named Shamvuka became free from sin and went to heaven after death, even though he had come to Hardwar solely on business.[79] These stories promise immediate religious merit, even for sinners, *shudra*s, and businessmen. Even though one might expect skepticism about such claims (as with any advertising), these claims would have reinforced existing ideas of Hardwar's sanctity. Hardwar's *panda*s still use the MPM in exactly this way, both in public signs and in private conversation.[80]

In addition to highlighting the power of place, the *mahatmya* also mentions certain powerful times:

> Those blessed mortals [who] see (i.e., visit) Gangadvara are not born
> again, even for one billion *kalpa* ages, especially [those who come]
> during the sun's exceedingly meritorious transition into Aries,
> or when this [transition coincides with] Jupiter in Aquarius,
> [a conjunction] praised by the gods, on a solstice or an equinox,
> a transition of the sun or moon, an eclipse or *vyatipata* conjunction,
> a full moon, O Great Sage, the new moon on any Monday whatsoever,
> and the new moons in [the lunar months of] Magha, Vaisakha, and

> Kartik. O Best of Sages, thirty five million *tirtha*s are here at these times, one [who] bathes there attains everything. (MPM 9.15–19)

Many of these times are important even now—which is not surprising, since the MPM was probably written within the past two centuries. The sun's transition into Aries is an important yearly festival (Baisakhi), and the Kumbha Mela occurs when this transition coincides with Jupiter being in Aquarius. One also finds large crowds coming to bathe on certain astrological transitions, certain full moons, and any eclipse or Somavati Amavasya (new moon falling on Monday).[81] The MPM's focus on particular times is another clear difference with the HDM. The latter mentions only Ganga Dashahara, which is not mentioned in the MPM.

The MPM's "modernity" and its differences with the HDM are also apparent in the sacred regions (*kshetra*) the two texts describe. Both texts mention Bilvakeshvar, Kankhal, and Nila Parvat—although the HDM stresses only the first—but the HDM also devotes considerable attention to the four sacred pools (*kund*s): Bhimakund, Ramakund, Suryakund, and Brahmakund. None of these pools are important for the MPM; it briefly mentions the last two but devotes its major narrative attention to the Daksha temple. Almost all of the sites listed by the MPM are still important, and the only major difference with modern Hardwar's sacred landscape is that the MPM gives little attention to Brahmakund, which is now Hardwar's premier site. This greater modern emphasis could well reflect Brahmakund's nineteenth-century development, as chapter 3 describes in greater detail.

The MPM is rich in information, but in terms of style it is far less interesting than the HDM. The vocabulary is basic, the language formulaic, and the text plods almost exclusively in *anustubh*, the simplest and most common poetic meter. The MPM's piecemeal composition indicates multiple compilers, although certain sections have clear internal unity: the Daksha story in MPM 3–5, the tale of Dharmadvaja in MPM 13–14, the use of the *Varaha Purana* in MPM 16–21, or the tale of Rama and Lakshmana in MPM 21–23. Chapters 2, 8, 15, 19, and 23 are largely lists of places, which make the text seem rambling and unfocused; as noted earlier, their primary role seems to be to connect the text, either by bridging between different sections or by filling out smaller sections. These qualities are very different from the HDM, in which the style, language, and command of meter point to highly accomplished writers, and which has more tightly composed text.

Despite its stylistic faults, the MPM has been important for two reasons: it mentions times and places that are still important in modern Hardwar, and it was widely disseminated in print in the early 1900s. The written text remains

an important source for contemporary authors, and local brahmins still use it as a reference work.[82] The subtitle to the 1911 Hindi edition of the *Kedarakhand* explained that it was written "to inform pious pilgrims about the essential details for all aspects of their pilgrimage, and the ancient stories about the Himalayan region." It has fulfilled both of these objectives in the past and continues to do so today.

3

The History and Development of a Pilgrim Center

The Sanskrit texts bear clear witness that Hardwar has been a pilgrimage site for a long time. These texts clearly reveal Hindu ideas about Hardwar, but they cannot be considered historically reliable. They are difficult or impossible to date, except for the manuscripts, and even when they can be dated, one cannot assume that they describe real people and events. These texts reveal volumes about their authors, and something, too, about Hardwar itself, but they were never meant to be historical records. This judgment is not meant to denigrate these sources, but to respect them for what they are—documents written to raise and reinforce Hardwar's prestige as a sacred site.

In fact, historical references to Hardwar are sparse until about 1800, and its history must be pieced together. Some elements in this historical picture are remarkably constant—the earliest sources consistently stress Hardwar's importance as a pilgrimage place, and practices described there can still be found today. Yet the shifting emphases in the *mahatmya* literature lead one to suspect that Hardwar underwent considerable change, and other sources clearly support this claim. This chapter traces Hardwar's recorded history—starting with these early consistent characterizations—but focuses particularly on the past 250 years, when these changes have been the most dramatic. This gives a different perspective on Hardwar than the *mahatmya* texts, and one that reveals different things. Yet both perspectives point to a vibrant and vital pilgrim center that has passed through many transformations in its recorded history.

Hardwar's metamorphosis from a quiet bathing-place to a bustling city began in the mid-1700s, when the spring bathing festival gradually became an important marketplace. The festival's economic weight affected other dimensions of Hardwar's life, particularly as powerful groups sought to control this trade. The most important of these groups were the *naga sanyasi*s, who are still influential in Hardwar. The *naga sanyasi*s were militant ascetics who often took work as mercenary soldiers and whose leaders were wealthy and powerful men—very different from the stereotype of the gentle renunciant. These ascetics were not afraid to use force to retain market control, although their supremacy was never unchallenged.

Ascetic influence waned with the advent of British rule, which is the next sea change in Hardwar's development. Trade flourished under the relative stability of British rule, and Hardwar prospered. The early 1800s saw a construction boom, spurred in part by British government projects, such as the new bathing *ghat* at Brahmakund and the supply channel for the Upper Ganges Canal. Such works began Hardwar's transformation from a natural river site to an urban religious center. Another pivotal event was the coming of the railroad in 1886. On one hand, the railroad effectively ended the spring trading festival, just as it withered many other traditional trading networks. At the same time, the railroad dramatically increased pilgrim traffic and was a major factor spurring Hardwar's growth.

As Hardwar grew, local interest groups sought to control the city and its resources. This sometimes brought them into conflict with the British government, which had its own concerns, particularly to maintain health and safety during large festival gatherings. These differing interests led to intermittent conflict between 1870 and 1930 that culminated in the 1916 conflict over the Bhim Ghoda weir. The British maintained that the weir was essential for irrigation, and the local people were equally emphatic that damming the Ganges was sacrilegious.

The final section discusses the period from about 1930 to the present. This era has seen Hardwar's ongoing expansion and development, a process that has effectively transformed the city. This section examines important factors that have shaped this growth—among them, the social pressures found in the rest of Indian society—and ends by inferring where these forces may lead.

Early Testimony

As mentioned previously, Hardwar's sparse early sources consistently describe it as a pilgrimage place. Passage 53 of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* (fifth century CE)

refers to Kankhal, but mentions only the Descent of the Ganges.[1] The earliest specific description comes from Hsuan Tsang, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim whose detailed account of his extended stay in India (629–45 CE) provides invaluable contemporary data. Hsuan Tsang calls Hardwar Mo-yu-lo (probably a form of Mayapuri) and describes it thus:

> Not far from the town, and standing by the Ganges river, is a great Deva temple, where very many miracles of divers sorts are wrought. In the midst of it is a tank, of which the borders are made of stone joined skillfully together. Through it the Ganges river is led by an artificial canal. The men of the five Indies call it "the gate of the Ganga river." This is where religious merit is found and sin effaced. There are always hundreds and thousands of people gathered together here from distant quarters to bathe and wash in its waters. Benevolent kings have founded here a "house of merit" (*punyashala*). This foundation is endowed with funds for providing choice food and medicines to bestow in charity on widows and bereaved persons, on orphans and the destitute. (Hsuan Tsang 1969: 4.197–98)

Hsuan Tsang's brief account describes still-vital religious practices. The central practice was bathing in the Ganges; as the text notes, "this is where religious merit is found and sin effaced." His comment that crowds of people came there from great distances testifies that it was a well-known pilgrimage site. The "house of merit" indicates that pious giving was prevalent even then. Finally, his reference to "widows and bereaved persons," combined with an earlier reference to placing the bones of the dead in the Ganges, hints that Hardwar may have been a center for funereal rites.[2] Bathing, gift giving, and funereal rites are still important practices in Hardwar—as well as the notion that one gains religious merit there—and this suggests that they have been so throughout its history.

These same features appear in later accounts, such as the *Malfuzat-i-Timuri*, which describes the Emperor Timur's "triple victory" at Hardwar on 13 January 1399. Since this text was written as court panegyric, it undoubtedly exaggerates the truth, and careful reading reveals that only one "victory" was against an armed foe. The other "adversaries" were almost certainly ordinary people fleeing his army, since his memoirs describe him as capturing great numbers of women and children, "property and goods which exceeded all computation, and countless cows and buffalos."[3] Such ruthless slaughter clearly shows no sympathy for these unfortunate people, but his description of Hindu practices seems remarkably consistent with earlier and later accounts:

> The Hindu infidels worship the Ganges, and once every year they come on pilgrimage to this place (i.e., Hardwar), which they consider the source of the river, to bathe and to have their heads and beards shaved. They believe these acts to be the means of gaining salvation and securing future reward. They dispense large sums in charity among those who wear the Brahmanical thread, and they throw money into the river. When infidels die in distant parts, their bodies are burned, and the ashes are brought to this river and thrown into it. This they look upon as a means of sanctification. (Timur 1871: 3.458)

All of these rites—bathing, shaving, giving gifts to brahmins, throwing valuables into the Ganges, and depositing the ashes of the dead—were not only recommended in the *purana*s and *mahatmya*s but also are still done today. On the whole, the ritual actions prescribed in the *mahatmya*s seem well attested by historical sources, and they seem to have been remarkably stable.

Similar accounts appear in Mughul-era sources. The first come during Akbar's reign, a peaceful and politically stable era in which "the general tranquility is reflected in the absence of incidents that would have attracted the attention of the historians" (SDG 1981: 46). The general stability and tolerant religious climate would have been conducive to increased pilgrimage, and as mentioned earlier, the *Haridvaramahatmya* was probably composed in response to increased pilgrim traffic at this time. Several documents contemporary with the HDM mention Hardwar. Abul al-Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* depicts Hardwar as a Hindu sacred place on the Ganges[4] and notes "large numbers of pilgrims assemble there on the tenth of Chaitra."[5] Similar reports come from Hardwar's first recorded European visitor, Tom Coryat. He went to Hardwar for the spring bathing festival in 1617 and noted "they [the Hindus] assemble daily to wash their bodies, ascribing a certain divinity to Waters, but more especially to the Water in the River Ganges."[6] One source describes him as estimating a crowd of 400,000, and this indicates substantial traffic, even if that number is grossly inflated (Majumdar 1974: 7.193).

Similar reports of large festival crowds are mentioned in the *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, a gazetteer probably written in 1695 (Sarkar 1901: xi–xii):

> Although according to the holy books the river Ganges should be worshipped from its origin to its end, yet Hardwar is described as the greatest of all holy [places on its banks]. Every year, on the day when the sun enters the sign of Aries—which is called *Baisakhi*—people from every side assemble here. Especially in the year when Jupiter enters the sign of Aquarius (otherwise named *Kumbh*)—which happens once every 12 years—vast numbers of people assemble here from remote distances. They consider bathing, giving alms, and

> shaving the hair and beard at this place, as acts of merit, and the throwing of the bones of the dead into the Ganges [as the means of] salvation of the deceased. (Sarkar 1901: 19)

This account highlights Hardwar's ritual stability by describing religious acts first mentioned by Hsuan Tsang: bathing, almsgiving, shaving, and placing the bones of the dead in the Ganges. It reinforces other reports that large crowds gathered at Hardwar for spring bathing and also mentions two specific festival times—the Baisakhi festival, and the Kumbha Mela (for which the *Khulasat* gives the first attested mention). The annual Baisakhi festival occurred when the sun moved into the sign of Aries and is described as drawing people "from all sides." The text describes the Kumbha Mela as an enhanced version of the Baisakhi Mela, celebrated when Jupiter was in the sign of Aquarius; the comment that the Kumbha Mela drew "vast numbers" from "great distances" seems to indicate even greater sanctity. In the following centuries, both festivals would take on even greater importance—the Baisakhi festival as north India's most significant marketplace and the Kumbha Mela as the world's largest religious festival.

Hardwar's Rise as an Economic Center

Hardwar's gradual transformation from a quiet bathing place to a bustling pilgrim town began in the early 1700s, when the Mughul Empire began to unravel after Aurangzeb's death. The following century was often violent and politically unstable, but this same instability helped create new social, political, and economic patterns. As Christopher Bayly notes, the destruction of old institutions provided the opportunity for new ones to arise, the decline of traditional patronage led artisans and workers to gravitate to newer centers, and—most important for Hardwar—the disruption of established trade routes led to the growth of new pathways (1983: 110–62). The growing instability in eighteenth-century Punjab caused the entry point for northern and western goods to shift gradually further east and north: first from Sialkot and Multan to Bilaspur, and later from Bilaspur to Hardwar (Bayly 1983: 156). As Hardwar gradually became the primary distribution point for this extremely valuable trade, it became an important economic hub, as well as a pilgrim center.

These goods were transported in armed caravans, since unattached "free merchants" risked robbery and death (Bayly 1983: 157). Merchants attached themselves to a caravan leader, who took responsibility for their safety, and this arrangement made safe passage reasonably certain, although bandits could carry off stragglers (Raper 1979: 452–53). The market ran during Hardwar's

spring bathing festival, which provided a definite time for the market every year and allowed the caravans to time their departures appropriately.

This trade route was so flexible and the merchants were so determined because the trade was immensely lucrative and would always bring a handsome profit. Among the goods on this route, Raper mentions dry fruits, shawls, ivory and brass manufactures, rock salt, and woolen cloth (1979: 452); Bayly also mentions gold, musk, and Persian carpet dyes (1983: 156). Bayly particularly stresses the shawls, which he claims carried immense symbolic value. He describes the Kashmir shawl as the "universal symbol of aristocracy in the Indo-Persian world" and even contends that the market was primarily a shawl mart (1983: 59, 280).

Accounts of the fair in the early 1800s certainly mention shawls but give far greater attention to livestock, which seems to have been the fair's most important feature. For many years, the Hardwar fair was the largest horse fair in India, and one of the regular visitors was the East India Company, which sent representatives to buy cavalry remounts.[7] There were also camels, cattle, and elephants, as well as exotic animals—felines from domestic cats to tigers, "dogs, bears, monkeys, birds, and deer of every description" (Roberts 1845:43), and even a wild ass from the Rann of Kutch.[8] The exotic animals would have been brought only for sale, but the horses, camels, and other beasts of burden not only were sold as merchandise but also carried merchants and their goods to the fair.[9] After the fair, the merchants could return home, or they could continue down the Ganges into the Doab, to dispose of any unsold livestock or merchandise.

Capital and banking were clearly present at the fair, since these are essential perquisites for long-distance trade, and a host of bankers and moneylenders sent agents to Hardwar to provide this. They did this by issuing bills of exchange known as *hundis*, which seem to have functioned exactly like currency—Bayly reports that one of them might pass through twenty different hands before returning to the issuer for redemption (1983: 372). Raper notes that these bills could be made out for any amount and sent to any part of India (1979: 451), but the money trail actually stretched much farther—Bayly remarks that the flow of goods stimulated by the fair made possible bills of exchange between Bengal and Central Asia, even though direct trade had ceased between these regions (1983: 126).

Trade and banking from both ends of the Grand Trunk Road were thus being directly or indirectly channeled through Hardwar, and the growth of this lucrative trade must have increased Hardwar's visitor traffic. Some may have come solely for business and others solely for religious reasons, but many people probably had mixed motives, such as the brahmin from Kabul who sold the horses on which his party had ridden to Hardwar and then continued up the

Ganges to Gangotri (Davidson 1843: 111). Hardwar had long been famous as a pilgrim site, as the earlier accounts and the Sanskrit texts clearly show, but before the advent of the fair, there is no evidence that it had any economic importance whatsoever.

How did this enormous annual fair affect Hardwar? Did the traffic generated by this lucrative marketplace help to raise its profile as a religious site and attract greater pilgrim numbers? Did the annual trade from the north and west help to create consistent patterns for religious patronage? In fact, there seem to be strong correlations between these, based on the Hardwar *panda* records on file at the National Archives of India. As first mentioned in chapter 2, *panda*s are local brahmins who serve as pilgrim guides. Each *panda* family has exclusive hereditary rights to pilgrims from a particular Indian region, and they protect this entitlement by keeping meticulous pilgrim records, as chapter 5 discusses in greater detail. India's National Archives has a substantial collection of these records, and the oldest ones I could find had dates in the mid-1700s, with pilgrims coming from Punjab, Rajasthan, and Haryana—an era and locations completely consistent with the growth of this trade.[10] This fair's economic impact certainly put Hardwar on the map, and it must have greatly stimulated traffic there. The fair remained an important marketplace until the railroad came to Hardwar in 1886, after which it disappeared almost immediately.[11]

Ascetics as Market Forces

The organized ascetic bands were an important and powerful force in this late-eighteenth-century world. Hardwar has a long history as an ascetic dwelling place, given its identity as a sacred site and the gateway to the Himalayas. This particular section focuses not on those individual ascetics who pursued religious life in Hardwar, but on the organized ascetic groups, particularly the Shaiva Dashanami *sanyasi*s, who have influenced Hardwar's economic and political life at least since the seventeenth century. Internal evidence in the HDM suggests that it was written by a *sanyasi*, and since the Dashanami *sanyasi*s now control several of Hardwar's oldest sites—Bilvakeshvar, Maya Devi, Bhairav Akhara, and Daksheshvara—this means either that they have always done so or that at some point they were strong enough to displace the previous occupants.

Epigraphic evidence attests to a *sanyasi* presence in the early 1700s, though it is not unequivocal. An inscribed stone near the main Ganges channel at Nildhara records that in *samvat* 1772 (1715 CE), five *sanyasi*s of the *van* ("forest") suborder erected a *samadhi* (memorial) for their guru, Shri Ramakishen Van. The stone itself appears to be genuine, based on its general appearance and on

the nonstandard language and spelling in the text. The major uncertainty is whether the stone has always been in Hardwar, since the inscription mentions no location, and the stone is small enough (six by eight inches) to be easily relocated. If this inscription is genuine, it attests to an organized ascetic presence in Hardwar in the early eighteenth century.[12] One might also infer that this was a stable presence, since it seems unlikely that such a *samadhi* would be constructed without a fixed community to tend it.

The commonly held view of Hindu ascetics as complete renunciants, with no interest in the affairs of the world, was undoubtedly true in certain cases, but it is important to avoid projecting this on the whole. Many ascetics behave very differently from the stereotype of a holy man: they can be unpredictable and may verbally or even physically abuse those who displease them. As van der Veer points out, ascetics do not reject violence but embrace it both internally and externally—the former to subdue the body and gain magic powers, the latter to gain and wield worldly influence (1989: 133).

This was particularly true in the eighteenth century, when the organized ascetic bands (*akhara*s) were a potent political, economic, and even military force (see Figure 3.1).[13] In those unsettled times, the *naga* ("militant") *sanyasi*s served as mercenaries to both Hindu and Muslim rulers, and they occasionally established petty kingdoms of their own. The most famous *naga*s were Anup Giri and his brother Umrao Giri, alias Himmat Bahadur; the latter ruled Bundelkhand between 1790 and 1802 (Ghosh 1930: 68). Their long careers included service to the Jat chieftain Jawahir Singh, the Maratha leader Madhaji Scindia, and several terms of service to the Nawabs of Avadh. The bewildering speed with which they shifted alliances shows that they were not simply hired soldiers serving for money but men with ambition to rule, seeking the most favorable opportunities for advancement (Bhalla 1944: 128–36; Sarkar n.d.: 145–261). As van der Veer notes, at one time becoming a *sanyasi naga* would have been an extremely attractive career for an enterprising man, since the primary emphasis was on ability rather than social background, and there was the prospect for significant wealth and influence, if not actual kingly power (1989: 176–77). Although few *naga*s had the influence of Himmat Bahadur, the potential was always there.

Aside from their *naga* military might, *sanyasi*s also had substantial economic power.[14] This is not surprising, for they had all the necessary resources for long-distance trade: mobility, protection, and capital. Annual pilgrimage cycles for *sanyasi*s and *bairagi*s took them over much of north India, during which they could transport goods from one center to another (Ghosh 1930: 24–26).[15] One source reports them going as far as Tibet, where they would traffic in valuable goods that could be easily concealed in their robes—exchanging pearls, coral, and spices for gold and musk (Ghosh 1930: 18n, citing Bogle,



FIGURE 3.1. *Naga sanyasi*s lead the Mahanirvani Akhara in procession on Chaitra Amavasya, the Hardwar Kumbha Mela's second major bathing day. The horses, kettledrums, and banners are all symbols of their martial past, when the *naga*s made their living as mercenary soldiers and long-distance traders. Their former power is still ritually displayed during the Kumbha Mela, when they are given exclusive rights to the main bathing places during the holiest times.

Mission to Tibet). An additional factor facilitating mobility was that ascetics were much better organized than competing merchant groups. The *math*s ("monasteries") throughout north India provided a ready-made banking, marketing, and information network, as well as furnishing secure halting places along the way.

Protection for these *sanyasi* traders came from their own *naga* soldiers. Their military resources allowed them to trade in dangerous and politically unstable areas, and these were the regions in which they were most successful (Lorenzen 1978: 68). Aside from the basic protection furnished by strength of arms, their renunciant status conferred two further advantages. First was the common belief that ascetics could have magic powers, which could have powerfully enhanced their military strength. Also, their status as "dead to the world" allowed them to travel beyond the traditional borders of India, to regions that were ritually "dangerous" for caste Hindus.[16]

Aside from mobility and power, certain ascetic groups also had tremendous capital. This came partly from trade and mercenary activity, but *sanyasi*s also had significant landholdings: Bayly estimates that by 1750 *sanyasi*s were the largest property owners in Benares, Mirzapur, Nagpur, and Ujjain.[17] The *math*s themselves often had considerable lands, which provided a basis for money lending as well as trade, and when necessary, *naga* soldiers could be dispatched to collect from delinquent debtors.[18] The *mahant*s ("abbots") in charge of these *math*s were thus not only religious leaders but also executives managing multiple income streams.

When it came to conserving this capital, Bernard Cohn contends that ascetics had two significant advantages over merchant families. The first advantage was the differing inheritance patterns—the lion's share of a *mahant*'s property would pass to his successor, protecting the capital from fragmentation. This was not true in a joint family, in which each son was entitled to a share of the father's wealth, with the potential that fraternal conflict could divide the estate. The second advantage was that merchant families were expected to spend large sums for display, ceremonial, and religious purposes, from which ascetics were exempt (Cohn 1974: 93).[19] Bayly describes such lavish expenditures as "investments" to maintain the family's status as pious and respectable people. Such status was an essential element in creditworthiness—a primary business requirement—and it also enabled the family to contract marriages that would reinforce and maintain that status (1983: 376).

In practice, these differences were probably less significant than they seem. Even though a merchant family's capital could potentially fragment in every generation, this seems to have been uncommon. As Bayly points out, maintaining the family's commercial integrity was a primary goal in the merchant family ethos (1983: 369–93). Given this emphasis, fraternal splits that fragmented the family's holdings were probably rare. In the same way, even though householders had certain necessary status expenditures—particularly with regard to marrying their daughters—ascetics had status expenditures of their own, which would have entailed considerable expense. Raper reports that on occasions such as the Kumbha Mela, wealthy ascetics would expend large sums to provide for poorer ascetics or to give as charity to brahmins (1979: 456). Ascetics were at least as concerned with status as merchant families and would have been just as likely to sponsor religious affairs. A Hardwar temple inscription reports that in 1820 the *sanyasi mahant* (abbot) Sharvan Nath spent 100,000 rupees—an enormous sum—to endow the temple and sponsor a banquet (*bhandara*); the inscription also mentions that he gave an elephant, horses, shawls, and golden plates as additional gifts to brahmins.[20]

Although in theory ascetics have renounced all social attachments, they are often acutely status-conscious, and spending money is an important way to create and maintain such status. Sharvan Nath's conspicuous largesse would have enhanced his status, but such expenditures would have been expected at the Kumbha Mela, by virtue of his position. Such status-related expenses may have come less frequently for ascetics than for merchant families, but they certainly existed. If this particular instance is any indication, it shows not only the level at which ascetics would spend but also that they controlled considerable wealth.

One must not build up these ascetics as monolithic, since there was intense competition even between different groups among the Dashanami *sanyasi*s. Three different sources record a 1567 battle between two Hindu ascetic groups at Thanesar, a pilgrimage place north of Delhi. Two sources describe these groups as Jogis and *sanyasi*s, and the third as Kurs and Puris, which have been identified as Giris and Puris, two of the Dasanami suborders.[21] Despite the differing identifications, all three accounts agree that the conflict was based on competition for resources—namely, the right to collect alms from pilgrims coming to the shrine.[22] The animosity between these groups seems to have persisted: later Maratha sources record several subsequent conflicts (Ghurye 1964: 101–3).

Yet by far the strongest conflict ran along sectarian lines, between *sanyasi*s and *bairagi*s. The bloodiest recorded encounter took place in 1760 in Hardwar, on the Kumbha Mela's final bathing day. The *sanyasi*s reportedly killed 18,000 *bairagi*s, and they banned *bairagi*s from Hardwar until the British gained control of the Doab. Raper describes this dispute as rooted in the enmity of two brothers, one of whom was a *sanyasi*, the other a *bairagi*: "In the Cumbh-Mela of that year, they both happened to meet at Haridwara, and mutual recriminations took place, regarding the tenets which they had individually embraced. From a private, it became a general cause; and it was agreed, that the sword should prove the superiority" (1979: 455).

Regardless of whether this particular story is true, these two groups already had a long history of conflict. The *Dabistan*, an eighteenth-century source, reports another battle at Hardwar more than a hundred years earlier:

> Vairagis are also called *Mundi*s, because they shave four parts of their bodies, and one shaved is called *Mundi*. . . . In the year 1050 of the Hejira (1640 A.D.) a battle was fought at Hardwar, which is a holy place of the Hindus, between the Mundis and the Sanyasis, in which the latter were victorious and killed a great number of the Mundis; these men threw away their rosaries of Tulsi wood which they wear about their necks, and hung on their perforated ears the rings of the Jogis, in order to be taken for these sectaries. (*Dabistan* 1843: 2.196–97)

A nineteenth-century manuscript reports an even earlier battle at Hardwar, in 1254 CE (*samvat* 1310). Certain anachronisms render this last story problematic, but at the very least it highlights the bad blood between these two groups.[23] Epigraphic and literary sources describe further battles at the Nasik Kumbha Mela in 1789 and on an unspecified date in Ayodhya.[24] The Nasik battle account is the only one that does not describe the *bairagi*s as being utterly defeated, but since it was the *bairagi*s who petitioned the ruling Peshwa after the Nasik battle, one suspects that they got the worst there as well.

Ramanandi oral tradition claims that these disputes stemmed from arguments of precedence at the Kumbha Mela bath, since the bathing order showed each group's relative status. As mentioned before, ascetics tend to be acutely status-conscious, both as groups and as individuals; Burghart thus interprets the Ramanandi claim to precedence as asserting Rama's universal sovereignty (1983: 373), whereas van der Veer highlights the desire to impress potential or actual devotees (1989: 134). These are both possible answers, but in the eighteenth century, far more than status was at stake. Since both groups were heavily invested in long-distance trade, and Hardwar had become the entry point for goods from the north and west, these conflicts could have signaled the struggle to control this lucrative market. According to Raper, the ultimate result of the 1760 battle was that the *bairagi*s were banned from Hardwar. During this time, the *sanyasi*s would have completely controlled this festival and its lucrative trade.

Thomas Hardwicke came to Hardwar for the 1796 Kumbha Mela, and his account testifies to *sanyasi* control over the Hardwar region:

> The ruling power [at Hardwar] was ... held by the priests of the *Gosseyns*, distinguished by the appellation of *Mehunts*, and during the continuance of the *Mela*, the police was under their authority, and all duties levied and collected by them. For *Hurdwar*, though immediately connected with the *Mahratta* government, and, at all other seasons, under the rule and control of that state, is, on these occasions, usurped by that party of the *Fakeers, who prove themselves most powerful*; and though the collections made upon pilgrims, cattle, and all species of merchandise, amount to a very considerable sum; yet no part is remitted to the treasury of the *Mahratta* state. (1801: 314–15, italics added)

This quote reinforces that the authority to rule over the fair was solely rooted in the power to do so, and one clear sign of the *sanyasi*s' primacy was that they were able to prohibit other groups from carrying weapons at the Mela (Hardwicke 1801: 315–16).[25] Hardwicke also states that the *mahant*s made considerable money from fees alone, not to mention their own commercial

endeavors. Power and earning capacity were thus intertwined. Yet the *mahant*s also had strong motives to maintain an orderly marketplace, since this promoted a stable business climate, and one of their roles was to resolve disputes and dispense justice. When one of Hardwicke's men was robbed by some Marwari merchants, all parties were eventually brought before the council of *mahant*s, who were the festival's ultimate authorities. Unfortunately for the Marwaris, they had been unable to look in the purse to see what sort of coin it contained, whereas the soldier was able to describe it exactly. The money was restored to the soldier, and the Marwaris were sentenced to a five-rupee fine and fifty lashes (1801: 315–16).

Yet these were unsettled times, and later events at that same fair showed how tenuous the *mahant*s' control actually was. During the festival, the *sanyasi*s tore down the standard of some Udasi ascetics, which had been erected without permission, then beat up the Udasis and plundered their belongings. The Udasis have close historical ties to the Sikhs—they were founded by Shri Chand, son of the Sikhs' first guru, Guru Nanak—and the Udasis complained to the Sikh kings at the Mela, Raja Saheb Singh of Patiala, and Roy Singh and Sher Singh of Boreah. These rulers negotiated the return of the plundered property but simultaneously laid plans to avenge the insult. On the fair's final day, mounted Sikhs attacked the bathing *sanyasi*s, and killed at least five hundred, including *mahant* Maun Puri (Hardwicke 1801: 318–19). Yet even though the Sikhs prevailed, their tactics—a quick strike and an immediate withdrawal—suggest that they were concerned about *sanyasi* military power and did not want to give them the time to regroup and fight a sustained battle.

Hardwicke visited Hardwar at the end of an era. Although *sanyasi*s still influence Hardwar's social and economic life, this was the last time they actually controlled the Kumbha Mela. Less than a decade after Hardwicke's visit, the Marathas had ceded huge chunks of the North-West Provinces to the British, and Hardwar came under British control. *Sanyasi* power rapidly declined under British rule, but the Pax Britannica's relative calm generated even greater pilgrim traffic, which the *sanyasi*s used to their advantage, just as did other prosperous property owners.

Hardwar in the Early British Era

There is a wealth of information for early-nineteenth-century Hardwar, primarily from the accounts of British soldiers and travelers who had come there for the fair. Barring the description of Hsuan Tsang, this is the first time one can construct a coherent picture, rather than simply reporting scattered events.

Furthermore, the accounts clearly show that these visitors came for a variety of reasons—administrative, commercial, and personal.

One reason was to ensure peace and order at the fair. Maintaining public order was one consistent rationale to support the colonial presence, and the fair had a consistent British military presence. This seems to have begun immediately after the British assumed control in 1803, since Raper reports that the detachment sent to the 1808 Kumbha Mela was "of greater strength than usual." He also reports that police enforced a ban on bearing weapons, which had to be checked at guard stations, and when one recalls the slaughter twelve years earlier, such precautions are understandable (Raper 1979: 450).[26] In later years, British military units were a regular part of the fair, both to ensure order and to control the festival crowds. The officers would camp on the road between Kankhal and Hardwar, while the troops would be stationed on an island in the Ganges, where they could quickly respond to any trouble.[27] The British military presence seems to have ended pitched battles, but crowd control was another matter entirely, as is discussed later.

East India Company employees also attended the fair to buy horses, since this was such an important market. This practice may precede British control, since Hardwicke's soldier was robbed while buying a camel, and it seems to have continued until the fair fell into oblivion. At least in the early days, the East India Company came to the fair to sell as well as to buy, although Raper notes that there was little demand for its products (1979: 452).

Individuals had their own reasons for going to Hardwar. Some were on official business: Hardwicke was on a diplomatic mission to Shrinagar; Raper was part of a team surveying the upper Ganges. Sometimes motives were humanitarian: in the early 1800s, one medical officer went at least twice to the fair to perform smallpox vaccinations and to disseminate information about inoculation (HMI: 5th March 1807). Sometimes motives were evangelical: several sources report Christian missionaries using the fair to distribute copies of the Bible and attempting to convert Hindus to Christianity. Although pilgrims seem to have treated the ministers respectfully (as would be appropriate for any holy man) and were reportedly happy to take copies of the Bible, there were very few conversions.[28] Finally, various accounts mention Europeans who came as tourists, simply to view the spectacle, and one account reports that wealthy Muslims would do the same.[29] Such casual visitors showed differing degrees of interest: Captain Mundy noted that the novelty wore off after a single turn around the city (1832: 159), whereas Thomas Skinner was so enthralled that he went there in consecutive years (1827 and 1828) and remarked: "A scene that offers such inexhaustible variety ... is never likely to grow tiresome to the traveler, whatever it may do to his description of it" (1832: 180).

These accounts provide valuable information, but they must be carefully evaluated. All of the writers attempt to convey the scene at the fair: the confusion and cacophony, the simultaneous mixing of people from every corner of India, and the almost infinite visual variety.[30] Nevertheless, these men and women were all products of their time—although some seem perceptive and even sympathetic, others show such clear bias that their accounts must be read with even greater care. This section examines about a dozen early nineteenth-century accounts to see what they reveal about Hardwar as a city and pilgrimage place, as well as about its contemporary social, commercial, and religious institutions.

Since these visitors generally arrived from Delhi, many accounts begin by describing Kankhal, which seems to have been larger and better built than Hardwar.

> With the exception of some handsome temples and *ghats* by the river side, together with the *serais* or places of accommodation for the pilgrims, Kunkhul consists almost entirely of one broad street; forming a succession of gateways and edifices. . . . The street is perfectly even in its breadth throughout, extending in a right line nearly three-quarters of a mile, rendering the perspective of the buildings very picturesque, as the jutting towers and balconies stand out one beyond the other, in all the endless variety of form and design of which Hindu architecture is susceptible (Bacon 1837: 160–61).[31]

The most striking feature of these buildings seems to have been the paintings on the houses. The most charitable description was "singular" (Skinner 1832: 125), other descriptions were "abominable" (Archer 1833: 163), "barbarous" (White 1838: 105), and "tawdry" (Bacon 1837: 161). Yet aside from their aesthetic responses, many of these visitors recognized that these were trophy houses and mentioned the status that they brought their owners—simultaneously attesting to their wealth and piety.

In comparison with Kankhal, Hardwar was hardly developed, and the accounts are unanimous that it was smaller and less impressive.[32] In 1796, Hardwicke found "a very small spot, consisting of a few buildings of brick the property of eminent *Gosseyns*" (1801: 310–11); in 1808, Raper commented that it was "very inconsiderable in itself, having only one street about 15 feet in breadth, and one furlong and a half in length" (1979: 449).[33] Visitors gave far greater attention to the unspoiled beauty of the surrounding hills, and references to tiger hunting show that this was no mere hyperbole.[34]

The town's overall outlines had changed little by the 1840s, if one goes by Sir Proby Cautley's survey map for the Upper Ganges Canal. The largest building on his map is almost certainly the magnificent structure depicted in

etchings dated 1825 (White 1838: 103) and 1834 (Roberts 1845: 40). This building is at least three stories tall, has towers and domes in Mughul style, and has a spacious *ghat* between it and the Ganges. Yet despite its magnificence, the town itself is strikingly small. The town drawn on Cautley's survey map had probably changed very little in several decades, although Cautley reported that there was a surge of new construction on the bank of the Ganges (1845: 12). This was spurred by the new supply channel for the Upper Ganges Canal, which is discussed in greater detail later.

Despite this continuity in the town's overall outlines, there had been some important changes, particularly around Har-ki-Pairi. Several visitors commend the new bathing *ghat* built by the East India Company and remark on the tragic event that preceded its construction. On the Kumbha Mela's main bathing day in 1820, nearly five hundred people were killed in a stampede at Har-ki-Pairi, including some of the soldiers who had been posted there for crowd control. According to Bacon,

> This catastrophe was in measure attributable to the confined size of the old *ghat*, there being only room for about five or six to descend abreast; orders were, therefore, given for the construction of a new one upon a grander scale; and now, under direction of Government, a noble flight of steps, seventy-five feet in breadth at the bottom, leads down to the water's edge, and the danger which before existed is greatly diminished. (Bacon 1837: 171)[35]

Since Har-ki-Pairi is Hardwar's central religious place, one would expect that such an impressive improvement would trigger further developments. Local moneyed interests seized the opportunity and built new and bigger temples around this showpiece. In 1808, Raper mentioned only "a plain building, surmounted by two cupolas" in the bed of the Ganges at the base of a hill (1979: 449).[36] In 1828, Skinner mentioned a temple with a bell at the top of the *ghat*; this is almost certainly the Ganges temple still standing at the top of the Har-ki-Pairi (1832: 187–88). Six years later, Bacon reported that building had continued unabated and claimed that "the towering pyramids and accumulating domes exceed in magnitude, though they do not rival in number, those of Benares" (1837: 171).[37] Bacon and others ascribed this construction to local brahmins, but they were actually built by the *sanyasi mahant*s, who control them still.[38] These *mahant*s had the financial resources to build the temples, as well as the influence to gain control of the sites in the first place. Even though British military power had removed *sanyasi*s' overt control over Hardwar, they still had considerable local authority.

Although it seems safe to say that bathing at Brahmakund had always been Hardwar's premier attraction, the new *ghat* and temples would have given it an

even higher profile and drawn traffic from other sites. One site marginalized by Har-ki-Pairi's higher profile was the Pancatirtha, a group of five pools in a streambed on a hill west of town. In 1808, Raper mentions these immediately after describing Har-ki-Pairi. He dismisses the brahmins' claims that the pools were spring-fed and describes their foulness as being exacerbated by the bathers' activity (1979: 458). The seventeenth-century HDM eulogized two of these pools, Ramakund and Suryakund. Raper's testimony corroborates the *mahatmya* and shows they were important spots. These places are now completely deserted, and they must have precipitously declined, since Raper is the only visitor to mention them. It seems quite likely that Har-ki-Pairi's magnificent new construction concentrated pilgrim traffic there, at the expense of more remote sites such as Ramakund and Suryakund.

Aside from Brahmakund and the Pancatirtha, the other frequently mentioned sites were Bhim Ghoda and Chandi Pahar, the hill atop which the Chandi Devi temple now stands.[39] Hardwicke (1801: 311–12) and Raper (1979: 459) both describe a large stone trident and various images.[40] Hamilton (1828: 667) reports that the trident was blown down in a storm and not replaced, and Skinner mentions only an "altar" to the goddess (1832: 182–85). Raper and Skinner both describe Bhim Ghoda as a cave cut into a cliff face with a bathing pool at its base; Skinner also describes a "pagoda" beside the pool.[41] Raper describes the pool as receiving a constant supply of water from a small channel of the river and as being a "commodious place for bathing" but notes that orthodox Hindus did not consider it particularly holy (1979: 458).[42]

Travelers' reports seem to show that Hardwar's religious sites were largely undeveloped even in the 1820s, and one's overall impression of these other sites is that they were natural forest places. One important factor changing this was Har-ki-Pairi's building boom, to which travelers between 1828 and 1834 bear witness; this would have stimulated building at other religious sites, which would have needed something to attract pilgrims, in light of Har-ki-Pairi's increased luster. In this way, one round of development would give rise to another, in an effort to attract pilgrim traffic.[43] In this respect, both Chandi Devi and Bhim Ghoda seem to have been more successful than the Pancatirtha, since they still exist today.

Religious Institutions

Most of the travelers paid little attention to the specific pilgrim rites. Raper's description is more thorough than most and echoes themes from earlier accounts:

> No particular ceremony is observed at the bathing, which consists entirely in the simple immersion. Those who are rigidly pious, or may have any apprehension in going into the water, are introduced by a couple of *Brahmens*; who having dipped the penitent in the holy stream, reconduct him to the shore. Few, however, require this assistance; and, as the water is not above four feet deep, the women even plunge in without hesitation, and both sexes intermix indiscriminately. After the ablution is performed, the men whose fathers are dead, and widows, undergo the operation of tonsure. (1979: 457)[44]

Bacon further relates that every pilgrim was obliged to throw a small piece of gold into the Ganges, without which the bathing would not be efficacious. As one might expect, this gold did not simply fall to the riverbed but provided a rich harvest for the functionaries there, who would either retrieve it before it hit the bottom or use small flat baskets to sort through the debris. Timur mentions this in his brief description of Hindu practices, and it continues to this day (see Figure 3.2). Since people occasionally deposit very valuable objects, there has been sharp competition for them. People have even gone to court to secure this right, but they are no longer the "jogis and gosseins" that Bacon claims were doing this at that time.[45]

Some accounts describe pilgrims going to temples or feeding the schools of fish at the *ghat*,[46] but other than bathing, the most common ritual action seems to have been giving money to brahmins. Skinner describes the brahmins as rendering a service—watching women's ornaments while they bathed, though he noted that the women sometimes had trouble getting them back (1832: 187–88)—but other accounts speak of them only in terms of taking tribute.[47] Yet even though pilgrims were clearly donating to these brahmins, there were relationships that the travelers did not perceive. These brahmins were the pilgrims' *panda*s (hereditary pilgrim guides) and were responsible for the pilgrims during their stay in Hardwar, for which *panda*s were entitled to fees and gifts. The *panda* records (*bahis*) of their client visits clearly show that these hereditary relationships were well established in the early nineteenth century. Only Davidson refers to these records: in one place he speaks of brahmins issuing "certificates" to pilgrims as proof that they had done the pilgrimage, and in another he describes *panda*s bringing books for Europeans to sign (1843: 92, 97).

This request was clearly related to the realization that the English were a rich and largely untapped source of patronage. In seeking Davidson's journal entry, the *panda*s were trying to claim the rights to his lineage. By this time, relationships with Indian clients would have been established by tradition, but



FIGURE 3.2. Scavenger combing the water downstream from Har-ki-Pairi for the "secret gifts" (*gupt dan*) that many pilgrims throw into the Ganges. His one hand holds a piece of glass in the water that breaks the water's surface tension and allows him to see the bottom clearly. The stick in his other hand not only gives extra support to legs made unsteady by long immersion in the icy waters but also is topped with a ball of pitch to retrieve any items found.

the British would have been ripe for the taking by any industrious *panda*.[48] Foreign travelers were also seen as potential donors simply by virtue of their status—and since liberal donation was one of the ways to maintain high status, it would have been expected of them—but it seems that the locals would have been disappointed here. Several writers relate that they had been asked for money, but only one reports giving any, and that in return for local information.[49] Davidson's description of what he wrote in the *panda*'s book illustrates the cross-purposes between these two groups: whereas the *panda*s were recording his visit to establish their claim to his lineage, Davidson wrote down his recipe for tomato sauce and, for the ladies, a sentimental song.

Although many travelers noticed the brahmins' prominent position, they were not nearly so perceptive with regard to ascetics, toward whom the reaction is almost invariably disgust and damnation. Mundy remarked on a "disgusting troop of fanatic fakirs, who, with neglected hair and beards, distorted limbs, long

talon-like nails, and hideously smeared visages and bodies, look more like wild beasts than human beings." The same gentleman gave a general estimation of such fakirs by noting that they were "more famed for sanctity and strictness of penance, than for the more humble virtue of honesty" (1832: 155–56, 133).[50]

These ascetics did not fit the writers' idealized picture of a "saintly" man, and it is important not to project this on them. Their socially marginal position allowed them to do ordinarily inappropriate things, and their use of both external and internal violence has been mentioned earlier. These accounts attest to both these tendencies: Davidson reports seeing a troop of *urdhvabahus,* men who had kept an arm upraised for so long that the muscles had atrophied in that position. He also reports begging ascetics "abusing the uncharitable with the grossest and most filthy language" (1843: 99, 91). Both of these show the external and internal violence of which ascetics are capable and the extent to which they disregarded conventional boundaries.

Despite these accounts, the organized ascetic bands were clearly an important economic force in Hardwar, although this is only mentioned by Hardwicke and Raper, the earliest visitors. This was especially evident to Hardwicke, since he went to Hardwar while the *mahants* still controlled the Kumbha Mela. Although Raper allowed that "many of them profess a total disregard for all worldly concerns," he recognized this as a facade: "Among these *Gosains* are many men of considerable property, who assume only the garments of the devotee, being in other respects well provided with all the comforts and conveniences of life; some of them follow a military profession, but the greater number are engaged in agricultural or commercial pursuits, in which they acquire large fortunes" (1979: 456).

The *sanyasi*s' economic influence did not fade away with the advent of British power. They were primarily responsible for building temples at Har-ki-Pairi in the 1830s, an 1892 government report speaks of them as "wealthy corporations" (HMI Jan 1892: 45), and they are rich and influential even now. Why do no other travelers mention this? Perhaps Raper was simply more perceptive than the others, who may have been misled by the ascetics' exterior appearance, but another possible factor is timing. Raper came to Hardwar much earlier than most of the others, very soon after the British had gained control there; this raises the possibility that certain vestiges of the ascetics' former power may have been more visible to him than to those who came in later years.

Social and Economic Life

As described before, economic gain was a powerful force drawing people to the Hardwar fair. All the visitors describe the marketplace at the fair, and it is

important to recognize how this economic engine affected the gathering. For a few weeks every year, the fair transformed a sleepy pilgrim town into a thriving marketplace, bringing with it all the values associated with the market. There must have been people who came solely for religious reasons, but a sharp boundary between merchants and pilgrims seems untenable, since Raper notes that most pilgrims brought along merchandise from their native regions because they could be "certain of an advantageous sale" (1979: 451).

Various accounts clearly show that the fair had all the evils in contemporary Indian society, as well as the caveat emptor ethos of the Indian bazaar. This seems to have been particularly pronounced in the livestock trade:

> Of all the innumerable rascals and impostors … the cattle-dealers, perhaps, take precedence. Their tricks and manoeuvres for passing off damaged and vicious cattle, are far more ingenious and more numerous, than can be boasted by our Newmarket jockies, or London stable-keepers. They understand all the arts of drugging, dyeing, etc., to perfection, and will score teeth or put on a tail, in a style worthy of admiration. (Bacon 1837: 180)

Coupled with this mentality was the assumption that a sale would involve bargaining and that one's opening price would be much higher than what one eventually expected to get. English buyers generally knew the value of these horses as well as Indians, but they were less used to spending an hour agreeing on what they already knew. For those not inclined to bargain for themselves, there was a class of middlemen (*dalal*s). These *dalal*s would not bargain viva voce but by signs: the two men would place their hands under a cloth and use their fingers to indicate the amounts.[51] This method ensured confidentiality for both buyer and seller and would be particularly useful for the latter—a merchant selling a string of horses might not want bystanders to know his lowest price. Davidson reports that the *dalal*s took only five rupees commission, but Raper makes the obvious point that they could not be trusted to get the lowest possible price, since they were usually in league with the merchants.

In addition to garden-variety cheats, there seem to have been plenty of common thieves as well, who sought to take advantage of this gathering's disorder and confusion. Sometimes this was strong-arm robbery, such as Hardwicke's tale about the soldier whose purse was taken by Marwaris, but most thieves seem to have preferred stealth to force. Several writers report being robbed, and one details how resourceful criminals could induce sleepers to turn over in order to steal the sheet from beneath them.[52] As one might expect, people did not take kindly to such things, and apprehension would bring

unpleasant consequences. Davidson reports that for the duration of the fair, the servants of the Begum Somroo displayed the head of one clumsy thief on a spear as a warning to others (1843: 96). The punishment given to the Marwaris, a five-rupee fine and fifty lashes, seems mild in comparison.

Other social evils were also readily evident. One veiled reference to the "naughty profession" seems to indicate prostitution, which could reasonably be expected at a gathering with so many people and so much money (Davidson 1843: 89). There are references to dancing girls performing in the streets of Hardwar, and one traveler discovered to his horror that the dancers were actually men in costume, although he professed that he was completely fooled.[53] It seems clear from these descriptions that the annual fair involved a great deal of celebration, as well as a great deal of religious fervor, and thus reflected every aspect of contemporary society.

The Transformation of Hardwar

Until the mid-1800s, Hardwar's life had a stable pattern: it was an important marketplace for a few weeks each April but virtually deserted for the rest of year.[54] This pattern gradually shifted in the mid-nineteenth century, spurred by several important factors, and the pace of change has been continually accelerating since then. The first important factor was the Upper Ganges Canal, which carried Ganges water to irrigate the Doab region between the Ganges and the Yamuna.[55] In part, the canal was important because it connected Hardwar with the outside world—the officers in charge of the canal works provided a permanent British presence in Hardwar, and as late as 1885, the canal works had Hardwar's only telegraph office (IGI 1885: 334). Far more significantly, the canal works altered the topography of Hardwar and of its most important site, Brahmakund. The word *kund* ("pool") connotes a water body with little or no current, which hardly describes the modern Brahmakund. Yet according to Cautley's canal survey map, the original Brahmakund was a narrow pool fed by a tiny branch of the Ganges, with one small outlet back to the main channel and an even smaller outlet going to Kankhal. The canal's present supply channel—which runs past Har-ki-Pairi and forms modern Hardwar's eastern boundary—is an artificial excavation in which those original channels were greatly enlarged.

The government carried out this excavation to create an adequate supply channel for the canal, but the work had two immediate affects on Hardwar. First, the excavation created a much larger bathing area and brought in a much greater volume of water. This is clear from the 1855 Kumbha Mela report, which

notes that whereas formerly the entire channel had been "so shallow as to be fordable at any point," now the current had become "dangerously deep and rapid, and the Pyree Branch Channel was fordable at no point between the Bathing *Ghat* and the Mayapur Dam" (NWPJCP, June 1855 no. 2: 17). The new channel also stimulated local development by creating highly desirable building sites on the canal bank, and Cautley's report notes the extensive construction there (1845: 12).[56]

The second major stimulus to Hardwar's development was the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway, which arrived thirty-odd years later, in 1886. As Ian Kerr has shown, rail transport substantially altered pilgrim visitation patterns throughout India, and Hardwar was no exception (2001: 326). Local officials initially worried that the railroad would further swell crowds at festivals such as the Kumbha Mela, but they soon discovered that the single track line had little impact on such enormous crowds.[57] The railroad's longer term effect was to shift pilgrim visitation patterns. Hardwar's few large festivals had always brought predictable pilgrim surges, but the railway helped to transform Hardwar into a year-round pilgrimage town. Train travel's convenience made it possible for pilgrims to come frequently, rather than once in a lifetime, and its speed allowed people to go and return home in a few days, rather than the weeks or months formerly needed (HMI Jan 1892: 51). Major festivals were still well attended, particularly the Kumbha Melas, but pilgrims now began coming to smaller festivals (e.g., a Somavati Amavasya) even during the growing season. Rail travel's ease and convenience also transformed pilgrims' willingness to endure hardships on the journey. When bubonic plague caused the authorities to suspend train bookings to Hardwar in 1897—a mere eleven years after the railway arrived—the local *panda*s complained that this was equivalent to closing the fair, since people "had now become accustomed to the railway and would not undertake the *bandobast* ["preparations"] required for a journey by road" (HMI Jan. 1898: 23).

Even as the railway stimulated year-round pilgrim traffic, it dealt a death blow to Hardwar's annual fair. As late as 1885 (one year before the railroad's arrival), the *Imperial Gazetteer* proclaimed: "The Hardwar meeting also possesses considerable mercantile importance, being one of the principal horse-fairs in Upper India. . . . Commodities of all kinds, Indian or European, find a ready sale, and the trade in the staple food-grains forms a lucrative traffic" (IGI 1885: 5.334). In 1891, the Kumbha Mela officials prepared for a large horse fair, but it seems to have been very small, which they attributed to fear of cholera (HMI Jan. 1892: 42, 57). The 1903 Kumbha Mela report noted that 191 animals "of inferior quality" had been brought for sale, of which only 36 had been sold—a pale reflection of past glory (HMI Sept. 1903: 16). The 1908 *Imperial*

Gazetteer describes Hardwar only as a pilgrimage site, indicating that the fair had completely disappeared.

The canal and the railroad altered Hardwar's physical, social, and economic landscape, yet both of these ultimately resulted from the British presence in Hardwar, which was another powerful force, particularly after 1857. Hardwar was largely unaffected by the events of 1857–58, but the aftermath had far more significant consequences.[58] After 1857, India was directly ruled by the British crown, as part of the British Empire. On one hand, Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 explicitly pledged that her government would not interfere in her subjects' religious lives:

> Firmly relying ourselves on the truth of Christianity, . . . we disclaim alike the right and desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects. We declare it to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in anywise favoured, none molested or disquieted, by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects. (Muir 1923: 382–83)

On the other hand, direct rule meant that the government now took greater responsibility for public health and safety—particularly with regard to epidemic diseases. For the next forty years, the colonial authorities struggled to uphold this dual mandate: noninterference with Hindu religious belief while guarding public safety.

In striving to maintain peace and order, the British government was continuing the East India Company's earlier policy; after all, ensuring life and property is the minimum requirement for a ruling power. As mentioned earlier, soldiers were routinely posted at Hardwar festivals and especially at the Kumbha Mela, given the large crowds of ascetics and its history of violent conflict. This seems to have begun immediately following British control of Hardwar. Raper mentions that there were more troops "than usual" at the 1808 Kumbha Mela, and their only job seems to have been to disarm pilgrims before bathing (1979: 450). In the 1820s and 1830s, travelers mention soldiers at the annual fair, but by 1870, soldiers were dispatched only to the Kumbha Melas, and the annual fairs had been delegated to the police.[59]

The British authorities were well aware of the Kumbha Mela's bloody history, and they attempted to prevent conflict both by carefully choreographing the *akhara* bathing processions and also by deciding questions of precedence. There are hints of such supervision in 1844, but the orders for the main bathing

day in 1855 explicitly list each *akhara*'s place in the bathing order, as well as its route to and from the bathing place (NWPJCP June 1855: 3).[60] In later Melas, the schedules grew even more detailed and complex. Questions of precedence were unusual, since the British upheld the "traditional" bathing order—an order that had originally reflected a group's actual local power. In 1844, the Udasis (a Hindu ascetic order founded in the sixteenth century by Guru Nanak's son Shri Chand) had somehow managed to bathe before the *bairagi*s, but in 1855, the authorities gave precedence to the latter. In that same year, the British settled the bathing order for the Udasis, who had recently split into two groups (NWPJCP June 1855: 2/14–15). A different problem arose in 1891 and 1903, when a group of Sikhs calling themselves Akalis demanded a place in the bathing procession. These were not the Nirmalas, for whom the Akalis "entertained a special enmity … [as] dissenters from the true Sikh faith," but rather strict Khalsa Sikhs, and there was considerable tension between these two groups. The authorities gave the Akalis the option of either bathing after the others and being allowed to carry banners and musical instruments—objects identifying them as an *akhara*—or bathing first without these, and in both cases they chose the latter (HMI Jan. 1892: 45–46, Sept. 1903: 17–18).[61] Such assiduous government attention successfully forestalled any ascetic conflict, although clashes between the *bairagi*s and other ascetics were only narrowly averted in 1844 and 1891 (NWPJCP May 1844: 157/6; HMI Jan. 1892: 47–49).

Aside from managing the *akhara*s, the other requirement for keeping order at the Kumbha Melas was crowd control, for which memories of the 1820 stampede provided a constant worry. Until 1855, crowd control seems to have largely been disarming people before they bathed, but after that, it grew steadily more complex. One significant reason for this was the danger created by the Ganges Canal, which had opened in 1854, and which deepened the channel so dramatically that it was no longer fordable (NWPJCP June 1855: 2/2). Beginning in 1867, the authorities constructed temporary bridges across the channel, and these bridges were also used to control traffic to and from the bathing place.[62] By 1891, the authorities were using drop gates to control the crowds, with colored flags to coordinate gate openings and closings; similar sorts of arrangements—using more sophisticated technology—have continued to the present (HMI Jan. 1892: 12–17). Although blemished by a few accidental deaths over the years, these crowd control-efforts have been extremely successful.[63]

Although the government's commitment to maintaining peace and safety showed strong continuity with earlier policies, its concern for public health reflected the empire's newfound sense of responsibility.[64] Hardwar's peculiar circumstances—small size, poor sanitary facilities, and enormous seasonal crowds—made it a breeding ground for diseases such as cholera, and this had

been true for a long time. Reporting on the 1867 cholera epidemic—which clearly originated at that year's Kumbha Mela—Dr. John Murray, the Inspector General of Hospitals for the Upper Provinces, noted that Hardwar festivals had been connected with previous cholera epidemics in 1783, 1819, 1827, 1829, 1855, and 1857 (HMI Jan. 1870: 401).[65] Yet even among these, the 1867 epidemic was exceptional. The Mela crowd was estimated at 1.25 million (HMI Jan. 1892: 40), and the pilgrim density can be gauged from Dr. Murray's observation that for an entire week, the stream of departing pilgrims going past Meerut, eighty miles south, was as dense as a London street (HMI Jan. 1870: 400).[66]

The government had devoted considerable attention to the Mela's sanitary arrangements, consisting of "good food and water, with free ventilation in a regular encampment, with convenient conservancy arrangements, the whole being kept in order by a most efficient Police force" (HMI Jan. 1870: 403). Unfortunately, these conservancy arrangements consisted of burying night soil in the porous soil next to the campsites, and when rains appeared before the main bathing day, "the whole ground must have been more or less impregnated with sewage" (HMI August 1869: 3281). When cholera appeared on the final day, it engulfed the departing crowds. Since the nearest railheads were at Ghaziabad and Ambala, most pilgrims would have departed Hardwar on foot and traveled between fifteen and twenty miles per day (HMI Jan. 1870: 402).[67] The pilgrims were crowded together, their resistance had been lowered by fatigue and exposure, and they were constantly exposed to the cholera bacillus, since they had to travel and camp on ground "strewed with the evacuations" of those who had passed before them (HMI Jan. 1870: 54). After infected pilgrims reached the railheads, the railway rapidly conveyed them throughout India; there was even an outbreak in Multan, which had not seen cholera for more than twenty years (HMI Jan. 1870: 54). In the end, there were 22,402 reported fatalities (HMI Jan. 1870: 402), and the infection patterns clearly showed Hardwar as the epicenter.[68]

An annual religious gathering that can potentially spawn an epidemic is a serious problem, and the British authorities wrestled with this for the next forty years. Rail travel and Hardwar's poor sanitation proved a deadly combination, and Hardwar fairs were implicated in cholera epidemics in 1872, 1879, 1882, 1887, 1891, 1892, 1903, and 1909.[69] Many observers saw these festivals as a proven danger to public health—one claimed: "I firmly believe that those dreadful epidemics which sometimes almost devastate whole districts … emanate principally from [the Hardwar fair]" (McIntyre 1889: 9)—and there were recurring calls to ban the fairs on this basis. Despite this persistent sentiment, the authorities were extremely unwilling to do so and dispersed only one festival,

the 1892 Mahavaruni Fair. This caused such controversy (as is discussed later) that it never happened again, although the authorities were willing to take less radical steps to limit the spread of disease.

Government reluctance to ban such festivals stemmed primarily from political considerations. They knew that this would create strong opposition, and after the 1867 epidemic, one official noted that Hindus overwhelmingly characterized the suggestion to avoid religious fairs because of the possible dangers as "*wicked in the extreme*" (HMI Jan. 1870: 41; emphasis original). More important, the British knew that any such ban would create significant political problems, since it would be seen as interfering with Hindu religious practice and thus contravening Queen Victoria's proclamation (HMI Jan. 1870: 42).[70] The political risk made officials extremely reluctant to ban festivals on sanitary grounds or to consider any legislation to this effect (HMI, Jan. 1893).[71]

These same political concerns led the authorities to demand incontestable proof connecting epidemics with religious festivals. When a cholera outbreak after the 1879 Kumbha Mela brought widespread calls to ban festivals based on sanitary considerations, the Sanitary Commissioner reiterated that "the facts should be ascertained with as great exactness as possible. No interference with the religious prejudices and habits of the people could be justified except on the clearest evidence that such interference is really called for, and that it would lead to beneficial results" (HMI June 1879 par. 1–2).

In this particular case, mortality statistics revealed that the disease had not radiated from Hardwar, refuting the claim that the Kumbha Mela was the source. Similar rigor was shown in 1893, when the Sanitary Commissioner and Home Secretary eventually traced a cholera infection to a water supply tank at Laksar railway station (the junction with the Hardwar branch line), despite a junior medical officer's eagerness to trace it to Hardwar itself (HMI Dec. 1893: 8).[72] Both examples illustrate that officials recognized the political issues at stake and were reluctant to take such a drastic action without clear evidence.

Although officials were reluctant to ban festivals, they zealously employed less drastic measures. The lowest level was to publish warnings in government gazettes when epidemic cholera appeared in districts that had religious fairs, as "a reasonable appeal to the educated and more advanced sections of the general population" (HMI Jan. 1892: 22). Sometimes this was sufficient, as at the 1891 Kumbha Mela, where these warnings were deemed to have deterred large numbers of pilgrims (HMI Jan 1892: 51). Greater danger called for stronger measures, all of which involved the railroad. One measure was to cancel special trains going toward the fair, while extending all facilities to convey people away. Regular trains, which could carry only limited numbers, were generally not canceled. Another option was to restrict booking from infected areas to prevent

pilgrims from importing disease to Hardwar. The most serious measure was to suspend rail booking to Hardwar, such as during the plague infection of 1897–98. This last measure decreased pilgrim traffic so dramatically that there was never any need to ban the festivals—graphic proof of how quickly train travel had shifted pilgrim attitudes.

These were all responses once disease had appeared, but the government's primary focus came to be sanitary precautions to prevent it from arising in the first place. The best records for this come from the Kumbha Melas, when the immense crowds raised far greater challenges to public health. Sanitary arrangements seem to have begun in 1867—although, as noted earlier, the conservancy arrangements were counterproductive—but after epidemics at Kumbha Melas in 1867 and 1879, the government intensified its efforts in 1891. To ensure success, the authorities imposed new and stricter measures that exercised even greater control over the town. All lodging houses were inspected and licensed, and the number of patrons strictly limited to prevent overcrowding. Most pilgrims were lodged in camps on the islands in the Ganges, where sanitation could be strictly and scrupulously controlled. The Mela grounds were divided into eight sectors, with each watched over by a sanitary patrol—a police inspector commanding a staff of vaccinators, constables, and *chaukidar*s ("watchmen"). Constables and *chaukidar*s had fixed beats, and their primary job seems to have been as "boots on the ground" to enforce the sanitary rules—to forestall overcrowding, to report and remove any filth, to isolate anyone with a contagious disease, and to ensure that animals and baggage were in their proper place (HMI Jan. 1892: no. 71, p. 3).

Sanitary measures in town were even stricter—a trend that continues to this day—and these reflected how seriously the government perceived this threat. Not only did the authorities inspect every house almost daily but also they took direct control over every single latrine in Hardwar. They demolished or closed private latrines that were deemed unsatisfactory and set up temporary toilet facilities throughout the city—a practice that the Mela authority continues to this day. The same is true for the use of disinfectant, which in this case was "perchloride of mercury in solution … freely sprinkled everywhere as required" (HMI Jan. 1892: 28).[73] These highly visible, highly intrusive measures clearly asserted British control over Hardwar, just as the current Mela administration does. All these measures were enacted in the name of sanitary progress, health, and safety, which the British saw as completely separate from the fair's "religious" elements—indeed, their stated purpose was to safeguard the site so that visitors could attend without danger.

Such strict measures meant that local elites lost significant control during the festival, although the British were willing to enlist them when necessary.

This was the case with the *sanyasi akhara*s, who would have bitterly opposed any outside control—not only because they were self-governing corporate bodies but also because they saw themselves as the Kumbha Mela's central figures.[74] The British resolved this by enlisting the help of the *sanyasi mahant*s, who were allowed to handle all infractions in their jurisdiction—an arrangement that reinforced the *mahant*s' traditional authority. The situation was very different for the *panda*s, the other traditional elite—they did not have an influential corporate presence and were simply subjected to the administration's dictates. Such increasing marginalization eventually erupted in protests against the British authority, as the following section details.

These new arrangements were very expensive: the government spent 56,666 rupees in 1867, 39,335 in 1879, 68,855 in 1891, and 73,166 in 1903.[75] These sums seem even larger when one realizes that the government spent 569 rupees in 1844 and 429 in 1855 (NWPJCP June 1855, 1/9). One reason for the dramatic increase was the need for bridges across the canal supply channel, which accounted for about half the total in 1867 and 1879. The other major expenses—police, medical, and conservancy—clearly show the government's growing concern for public health. The most dramatic rise came under conservancy, which quintupled between 1879 and 1891; the official in charge of the latter festival noted that the costs had been high, but that this was the only sure way to prevent an outbreak of disease (HMI Jan. 1892: 54–57).[76]

Revenue from pilgrim taxes and a tax on riding animals only partially offset these prodigious expenses, and the government was forced to use provincial funds to make up the deficits—in 1891, 42,998 rupees (HMI Jan. 1892: 71/5). A temporary solution came in 1894, when the government imposed a year-round pilgrim tax of two annas per person at the request of Hardwar's municipal council. Some of this revenue was used for municipal sanitary improvements, and the rest deposited in a designated account known as the Fair Fund against future expenses; any deficit between the Fair Fund's balance and festival expenses was advanced by the government against future revenue (HMI Sept. 1903: 25–26).[77] This arrangement worked until the early 1930s, when it became clear that Hardwar could no longer raise sufficient funds to provide for the burgeoning Mela crowds. The final solution came in 1938, when the Uttar Pradesh Melas Act shifted financial responsibility to the provincial government.

All of these sanitary measures—licensing lodging houses, setting up pilgrim camps, and arranging scrupulous sanitary facilities—were an effort to manage within the existing circumstances. Yet more delicate sanitary issues stemmed from the state of some of the holy places themselves. The 1891 Kumbha Mela report notes that pilgrims viewed bathing and drinking the water

at Bhim Ghoda and Har-ki-Pairi as a "means of obtaining spiritual good" but then noted that these were also "a certain means of obtaining bodily harm, judging not only from the appearance and smell of the water, but also from the fact that *comma bacilli* were found by Dr. Simpson in water obtained from the Harkipairi *ghat* on the great bathing day." The authorities tried to counteract this by increasing the water flow to these sites, and one official characterized these efforts as "hastily conceived and hastily executed ... but they undoubtedly had a marked effect in lessening the evil" (HMI Jan. 1892: 63).

As long as such conditions persisted, so would the potential for infection. Since banning pilgrimages was politically inexpedient, the only genuine solution lay in fixing Hardwar's sanitary deficiencies. The two most important improvements were in place by October 1893, and the impetus to carry these out clearly stemmed from the unpleasantness surrounding the 1892 Mahavaruni Fair, the only festival ever canceled on sanitary grounds. In January 1893, the government formed a committee to advise how to prevent cholera at festivals, and on its recommendation, the government immediately spent 80,000 rupees to improve conditions at Har-ki-Pairi and Bhim Ghoda (HMI Dec. 1893: 27).[78]

The Home Ministry document does not specify the improvements, but other contemporary sources do. The Bhim Ghoda tank had been paved for the 1891 Kumbha Mela and, by 1903, was supplied with water by an underground channel (HMI Sept. 1903: 16).[79] Archival sources are less specific about improvements to Har-ki-Pairi, but the 1908 *Imperial Gazetteer* mentions paving the bottom of the pool, directing the current to provide a constant flow of water, and erecting an iron railing to provide support for bathers (IGI 1908: 13.52–53).[80] This arrangement sounds little different from modern Har-ki-Pairi, but one must remember that at the turn of the twentieth century the actual *ghat* was much smaller and that buildings were demolished to expand its area in both 1938 and 1986.

The *Pioneer* article mentioned other essential sanitary improvements, such as paving roads, improving drainage, and facilities for rubbish and night soil disposal. It also noted that the government did not have the money to pay for these and expressed the hope that pious Hindus might contribute to a fund set up for this purpose. This was the Hardwar Improvement Society, a civic improvement group funded by donations from throughout India (HMI Dec. 1893: 27–28); it was superseded by the Fair Fund after the pilgrim tax was instituted in 1894.[81] With these improvements, Hardwar's sanitary state crossed a watershed. The 1903 Kumbha Mela report noted that Hardwar was "in a far better permanent state of sanitation than it was in 1891" (HMI Sept. 1903: 10), and although the authorities enforced sanitary precautions with their customary vigor, they no

longer had the palpable fear that any festival could become an uncontrollable epidemic.

Trouble in Paradise

This chapter's introduction hinted that relationships between the British and local elites were not always harmonious, since these two groups had very different objectives. As detailed before, the British wanted to keep the peace and to maintain health and safety, whereas the *panda*s (hereditary pilgrim guides) and the *akhara*s wanted to maintain ritual control over Hardwar and reap the economic benefits from an expanding pilgrim trade. As mentioned earlier, one of the railroad's effects was to spread pilgrim traffic throughout the year and to increase attendance at formerly minor festivals. Rail travel made it possible for pilgrims to go to Hardwar and return home in a few days, and this allowed them to make pilgrimages that would have previously interfered with the demands of the agricultural cycle.

The differing circumstances of these local elites were reflected in their relationship with the government. As wealthy corporate bodies, the *sanyasi*s retained considerable local influence, as discussed later. For the *panda*s, however, it was a very different story. They had little corporate representation and thus little influence with the British government, which in general held them in low regard. In addition to their ritual duties, many *panda*s owned or ran businesses connected with the pilgrim trade (sweet shops, lodging houses, and so forth), which meant that they had been increasingly affected by the colonial government's growing control, particularly during festival times. They had also been adversely affected by various social changes—particularly the decline in aristocratic patronage, as the landed nobility became supplanted by the commercial classes—and Prior suggests that their status had been gradually slipping since the early 1800s (1993: 34–37). The *panda*s' struggle against these forces and their attempt to reassert their traditional authority in Hardwar came out in four bursts of conflict with the colonial authorities. Two conflicts in the 1890s had clear economic roots—in particular, in *panda* attempts to reassert their primacy over Hardwar's religious life and to push back against a colonial government whose regulations were diminishing their income. The conflicts in 1914–16 and 1927 were less about money and more about control—the first to maintain Hindu control over the Ganges, and the second to control the Kumbha Mela. Both of these latter conflicts played on the national stage, and an underlying force driving both was nascent Indian nationalism, in which these struggles to control sacred sites were also symbolic attempts to

contest colonial authority. These latter conflicts are discussed in the following section.

Such conflicts were not confined to Hardwar but were common at Hindu pilgrimage places throughout India. Controlling religious institutions became an important avenue to resist colonial power—however symbolic—and to contest the legitimacy of colonial authority, since the government's pledged noninterference in religious affairs made this one of the few areas in which these rights could be confidently asserted. Physical resistance was out of the question, since the British wielded all the powers of the state, so Hindus responded by forming associations to focus their collective energies on particular issues. According to Bayly, "the desire to retain charge of pilgrimage centres, bathing and burning places or burial grounds was an important, and little recognized, force behind the growth of voluntary associations in late nineteenth century India" (1981: 182), and this was certainly true in Hardwar. As these organizations developed better communication with each other in the twentieth century, resistance moved from the local to the national stage.

The first conflict came after the 1892 Mahavaruni fair, the first (and only) festival canceled on sanitary grounds.[82] The festival fell on March 26, but when cholera broke out on March 24, the authorities decided to disperse the fair in the interest of public safety (HMI Dec. 1892: 29–30).[83] The government quickly received stinging protests from the Calcutta British Indian Association and the Lahore Sanatana Dharma Sabha, which protested this unacceptable interference in Hindu religious life, so contrary to Queen Victoria's proclamation. They further alleged that the authorities had dispersed the fair to conceal inadequate sanitary preparations and claimed that there would have been no harm in waiting another day, so that the estimated 100,000 pilgrims could have bathed on the holy day (HMI Dec. 1892: 29–35).

Such general complaints are fairly predictable, but the authors of these protests repeated far graver allegations against the European and "Muhammadan" police who had dispersed the fair, charges first leveled in a petition the Provincial Secretary had received from Hardwar's "Raises, Inhabitants, Pandas, and Mahajans" (HMI Dec. 1892: 26). Both alleged that a man named Charan Singh had been beaten to death for not supplying food to constables, that a European inspector had kicked the image of Daksha Mahadev, that temples had been locked up, that Europeans and Muslims had killed tame fish in Brahmakund and had defiled that place by wearing leather shoes, that a Muslim inspector and constables had trampled on *pinda*s (rice balls used for memorial rites) at Kushavarta *ghat*, that police had taken bribes, and that pilgrim huts on Rori Island had been burned. These were followed by allegations concerning outrages committed during the actual dispersion—"ruffianly Mussalman

constables" dragging women to the railway station, forcibly separating families, forcibly evicting pilgrims from houses, prohibiting shopkeepers from selling to pilgrims, and dispersing the crowd with whips, sticks, and batons (HMI Dec. 1892: 36–37).

These were grave accusations, but suspect. First, these charges were not filed by the pilgrims reported to have suffered these indignities, but by the *panda*s and inhabitants of Hardwar. The petition was sent more than two months after the dispersal, which is a long time to wait on such grave charges. The Calcutta and Lahore petitioners were obviously sympathetic to the *panda*s, and the latter document, after lamenting the fair's dispersion and alleging inadequate sanitary preparations, claims that the government's action had deprived pilgrims of two extraordinary religious opportunities—the opportunity for a Ganges bath on a highly auspicious day and the equally rare opportunity to give alms and gifts to their *panda*s on such an occasion (HMI Dec. 1892: 35)!

Although one suspects that these lost gifts distressed the *panda*s far more than the pilgrims, political pressure and the gravity of these charges compelled the government to convene a formal inquiry. The investigation involved very little pilgrim testimony, even though these complaints had been filed in their name. Despite placing advertisements in at least sixty-five newspapers and offering to pay their travel expenses, the plaintiffs could produce only thirty-three outside witnesses. Many of these had come to Hardwar for a Somavati Amavasya festival and had been persuaded to testify by their *panda*s, and none of them testified on any charge but that of "forcible ejection" (HMI Dec. 1892: 21). Eighty percent of the witnesses—and the only ones to testify on the serious charges—were local *panda*s, shopkeepers, and ascetics, whom the magistrate noted would all have suffered monetary losses from the dispersion.[84] Further, certain consistent errors as the hearings progressed—such as the type of shoes worn by the police—led the magistrates to conclude that the plaintiffs were repeating a story on which they had previously agreed (HMI Dec. 1892: 38–39).

By the inquiry's end, the gravest allegations had been completely discredited, and other charges withdrawn for lack of evidence.[85] In his summary, the Joint Magistrate remarked that "*the present complaints are by interested parties who desire to paralyse authority in such matters in future by showing to subordinate employees the results of carrying out unpopular orders*" (HMI Dec. 1892: 12; emphasis original). These parties were Hardwar's *panda*s, whom the magistrate explicitly described as "unprincipled rascals and liars."[86] He characterized them as deeply resentful at losing their expected gains and as searching for a way to strike back at the authorities. The magistrate further alleged that all three

petitions—Hardwar, Calcutta, and Lahore—were ultimately the handiwork of the *panda*s and a wealthy Calcutta merchant named Seth Suraj Mal.

Suraj Mal was an important man in Hardwar, both by virtue of his largesse to the *panda*s and because he had constructed the palatial *dharamshala* (pilgrim rest house) that even now bears his name. He was also a member of Calcutta's British Indian Association, and the magistrate alleged that Suraj Mal induced the association to file its petition after he heard *panda* complaints during an April visit (HMI Dec. 1892: 20). Suraj Mal delegated the composition of the Lahore petition to Pandit Gopi Nath, the editor of a vernacular paper there. The magistrate named Gopi Nath as a coconspirator with the *panda*s and Suraj Mal and further alleged that Gopi Nath took up the matter only after receiving a payment of a thousand rupees. In essence, the magistrate concluded that this whole affair had been an attempt to strike back at the authorities for closing the fair and to ensure that this would never happen again.

The government's interest clearly lay in discrediting these allegations and portraying this affair as unfavorably as possible. The text continually calls it an "agitation," a pejorative term for an antigovernment political action. The magistrate betrayed his low opinion of Hardwar's *panda*s by calling them "unprincipled rascals and liars" and alleged that Gopi Nath took up their cause only after being paid—that is, he was hired to stir up trouble and was doing it for the money. Regardless of whether the magistrate was correct about the plaintiffs' motives and character, the evidence clearly supports the British, at least on the serious charges. This is supported by the two-month delay before bringing up charges of murder, temple desecration, and slaughtering fish at Har-ki-Pairi—an unthinkable delay, had these events really happened—as well as dropping charges for lack of witnesses, and the general difficulty in getting pilgrims to testify at all. The government's righteous indignation at being falsely accused doubtless lies behind the aggrieved tone in much of the summary. More telling, the officials evince a sense of bewilderment. The dispersal had been signally unpleasant for all concerned, and the authorities did not understand why the *panda*s could not accept that it had been necessary, and that the authorities had been looking out for the greater good. In trying to ensure public health and safety, they were simply trying to fulfill their imperial duty.

Of course, the *panda*s were driven by an entirely different set of interests. Although the gravest charges were clearly false, this incident was ultimately about how much control the colonial government could exercise over Hardwar's religious life. Colonial sanitary controls had already seriously affected *panda* business interests, such as how many people they could lodge in their buildings. With the fair's dispersal, they saw their religion being more openly and powerfully restricted, and their protest was an effort to reassert control

over religious matters—particularly since interference with religious practice was one of the few viable avenues to oppose the colonial government. As Prior notes, the *panda*s were less concerned with bringing a winnable case before the government than in using these allegations to register an official and formal protest (1993: 49).

Prior also notes the *panda*s' deep conviction that the British were not only hostile to them as individuals (as the magistrate's comments clearly show) but more generally hostile to their religion (1993: 49). This is doubtless why the charges so often mention "Muhammadan" police officers, since a Christian colonial government would have greater affinity for Muslims and would use them against Hindus.[87] Such perceived hostility surely accounts for the only serious charge that could be substantiated—that police had trampled on *pinda*s (funeral offerings) at Kushavarta *ghat*. The District Superintendent of Police acknowledged that he and his men had stepped on the *pinda*s, which had fallen to the ground when they went to clear pilgrims from Kushavarta *ghat*. Despite this, he flatly denied being aware that Kushavarta was a sacred spot or that he had intentionally insulted Hindu sensibilities (HMI Dec. 1892: 52–53). Given the two sides' differing perceptions, his action could either be seen as a regrettable mistake or a calculated insult.

This sense of battling opposition to Hindu religion itself is almost certainly why the *panda*s were able to attract outside support. In both Lahore and Calcutta, the *panda*s could find a helping hand to curtail colonial (and Christian) interference in their religious practice—which had been specifically protected by Queen Victoria's proclamation of 1858. Claiming interference with religious beliefs was one of the most effective weapons to register a protest against the government; it was widely used.

In the end, the *panda*s drew prosperity from defeat. Although discredited and verbally abused, they gained their ultimate goal—preventing future festival cancelations, with the loss of income that this would entail. Since the railroad's arrival six years earlier had begun to bring pilgrim traffic throughout the year, the *panda*s' primary goal was to ensure their livelihood by keeping Hardwar and its festivals running. The British wanted to safeguard peace, order, and public health, and the conundrum was finding some way to fulfill both objectives. This unpleasant incident seems to have spurred the British toward the only genuine solution—permanent improvements to remove Hardwar's underlying sanitary deficiencies, as described earlier. The Allahabad *Pioneer* noted that the government financed the first round of improvements to Har-ki-Pairi and Bhim Ghoda and expressed the hope "that Hindus who are interested in the sanitation of Hardwar will co-operate by subscribing to a fund which has already been started for defraying the cost of the new works" (HMI Dec.

1893: 27).[88] This was the Hardwar Improvement Society, which was devoted to carrying out the remaining improvements—paving roads, arranging sewage and rubbish disposal, and installing drainage systems. Aside from their "good works," the Hardwar Improvement Society is also clearly one of the collective associations mentioned at the beginning of this section. The society's mission was patently "civic," yet it also organized Hindus to regain and exercise greater local control over their affairs.

Upgrading Hardwar's general sanitary condition was the only solution to fulfill both parties' goals, and epidemic danger decreased as conditions improved, although the authorities were always vigilant, particularly at large festivals. The Mahavaruni protest marked the *panda*s' first collective response, and the aggravation it caused seems to have spurred the government to action. This was the only festival that the authorities actually canceled, so it seems the *panda*s attained their ultimate goal.

The *panda*s' second collective action against the government came in 1897, when they sent a telegram to the Viceroy protesting suspension of rail booking. This incident not only underlines how the railroad had affected pilgrim traffic but also marks the first time the *panda*s formed an association—reflecting the organizational trends that served as channels for dissent in contemporary India. The incident stemmed from a bubonic plague outbreak at the Ardha Kumbha Mela in April 1897, which spurred the government to consider banning two smaller fairs in late May and early June.[89] The authorities ultimately decided not to ban the fairs, but they did impose certain precautions: pilgrims had to stay in camps away from the infected area, notice of the plague was inserted local gazettes, and most important, rail booking to Hardwar was completely suspended between May 24 and June 12.

The *panda*s fully cooperated with the authorities on these occasions, as they did when plague reappeared at Kankhal the following September—Kankhal's entire population abandoned the city for temporary camps, and the *panda*s themselves moved to Hardwar for a time. They were willing to cooperate with the authorities to keep Hardwar from being quarantined, which would have been catastrophic, but they strongly objected to suspending rail booking. This action reduced their income not only by reducing the total number of pilgrims but also because wealthy pilgrims performed *shradda*s at these festivals, for which the *panda*s received handsome sums (HMI Jan. 1898: 22). After the British suspended rail booking for the Somavati Amavasya on October 25 and Kartik Purnima on November 22, *panda* frustration resulted in an impassioned telegram to the Viceroy from the president of the Hardwar Sanatana Dharma Sabha (Hardwar Hindu Association). The telegram observed that the local people had been promised that no festivals would be canceled and that on this

basis, they had been willing to cooperate fully with the drastic measures to contain plague. Yet with the cancelation of rail booking for the Kartik fair, their confidence in official promises had been sorely shaken, and they requested that the government reconsider its action (HMI Jan. 1898: 35–36). An identical telegram was sent to the provincial authorities, and the authorities dispatched the magistrate of Saharanpur, Mr. Winter, to investigate both the Sanatana Dharma Sabha and the circumstances behind the telegram.

Winter reported that the Sabha had been formed in the spring, when *panda* worries over travel restrictions had led them to summon Pandit Gopi Nath, who had published the Lahore memorial after the 1892 Mahavaruni festival. The Sabha's stated objectives were to instruct Brahmins in their religious teachings and to improve the character of its members, but Winter thought that its actual raison d'être was their recognition that the government would give greater weight to petitions sent by an organization. He also reported that the Sabha was strictly a *panda* organization—that the *sanyasi mahant*s and other prominent men had refused to join it, despite attempts to enlist them. Financing for the Sabha, and for Gopi Nath's salary as president, came from a 2,500-rupee gift the Jammu ruler had given the *panda*s as alms (HMI Jan. 1898: 22).[90]

Upon further inquiry, Winter learned that Gopi Nath had sent the telegrams to the authorities and was solely responsible for their content, although the Sabha had supported sending them. The *panda*s were undoubtedly concerned by the official measures and unwilling to see booking continually suspended. The immediate protest was clearly about money, as the *panda*s freely admitted in Winter's report, but the larger issue was control over their livelihood. The *panda*s pointed out that the only times railway bookings were canceled had been during festivals, and they worried that these cancelations would become routine, since there was always epidemic disease somewhere in India. If that happened they stood to lose a significant part of their income, though they professed themselves ready to withdraw their objections if the government would compensate them for their loss (HMI Jan. 1898: 23).

This minor incident highlights how quickly the railroad had changed pilgrimage to Hardwar—after barely a decade, people had become so used to rail travel that merely suspending booking dried up the pilgrim traffic. It also shows the changes in the festival calendar. The festivals for which the train bookings had been suspended were all relatively minor: two Somavati Amavasyas, Ganga Dashahara, and Kartik Purnima. The 1891 Kumbha Mela reports testify that the railway had only limited effect on the largest festivals, since the line's maximum capacity was 25,000 pilgrims per day. The railway's biggest effect was to expand Hardwar's pilgrimage season, by inducing people to come to smaller festivals at other times during the year. Without the ease and speed of rail travel,

smaller festivals would have received little patronage, since many people would have waited for a more significant occasion to expend the time and effort to get to Hardwar.

This incident also marks Hardwar's first *panda* association, formed in an attempt to influence government policy. Although Gopi Nath's petition was poorly received, here, too, the *panda*s attained their ultimate objective: rail booking was not suspended for the annual fair in 1898, even though pilgrims had to stay in special housing (HMI May 1898: 5). In this regard, one could say that the petition had been successful, since booking was not canceled, even though plague was still active around Hardwar.[91]

Panda relationships with the colonial government were heavily influenced by its effect on their pocketbooks. In both cases just mentioned, they protested policies that they saw as diminishing their earnings, but in other circumstances, they were happy to commend the government. The specter of plague had reappeared before the 1903 Kumbha Mela, and the authorities considered banning the fair. In the end, Lieutenant-Governor Sir James LaTouche decided that the best safeguard for both the pilgrims and the provinces in general would be to rely "on the tact of the local officials, and on the loyal support of the people themselves, to enable the Government to make the sanitary arrangements necessary" (HMI Sept. 1903: 22). After the main bathing day, the *panda*s sent a telegram thanking him for his benevolent oversight, under which epidemic disease had been completely contained, and closing with earnest wishes for his continued prosperity (HMI Sept. 1903: 26).[92]

The *panda*s' telegram points to a genuine truth—namely, that the situation in Hardwar had changed, and every festival was no longer a potential breeding ground for a raging epidemic. The District Commissioner himself reported that Hardwar's recent sanitary improvements had permanently improved its overall sanitary condition (HMI Sept. 1903: 10). These improvements were the real solution to the conflict between these groups, and they allowed the parties to consign these epidemics to the past.

Although *panda*s played a prominent role in both of these incidents—doubtless spurred by their sense of marginalization and the danger to their livelihood—ascetics kept a much lower profile. Twenty-eight ascetics (of 130 witnesses called) testified at the 1892 Mahavaruni fair hearings, but for the most part, they seem to have avoided conflict with the British authorities. Such relative harmony probably stemmed from two factors. First, these ascetics were well-defined corporate bodies with a clear chain of command, which made it easier for the government to work with them. The other likely factor is that they were less vulnerable than the *panda*s to income loss from fluctuating pilgrim markets. As mentioned earlier, certain ascetic groups became wealthy and

influential late in the eighteenth century; this was still true late in the nineteenth century. The 1891 Kumbha Mela report notes that with the exception of the *bairagi*s, all of the others (the *sanyasi*s, Udasis, and the Nirmalas) were "wealthy corporations, with *akhara*s or monasteries in Hardwar or Kankhal, and … estates in Saharanpur and other districts" (HMI Jan. 1892: 45).[93] The report goes on to note that all of these groups—again, except for the *bairagi*s—had a clearly defined power hierarchy and that their leaders (the *mahant*s) had the authority to command their followers.

The differing circumstances among these ascetic groups clearly stem from their historical backgrounds. The Shaiva *akhara*s—Niranjanis, Junas, and Mahanirvanis—were (and are) the first groups to bathe during the Kumbha Mela, and this precedence reflects the days when they actually controlled Hardwar. The *sanyasi*s and the Udasis were both very wealthy groups, having retained the financial power they gained in the early 1800s. The *sanyasi*s remained centered in Hardwar itself, reflecting their longer history in the area and their earlier supremacy. The 1892 Mahavaruni inquiry shows that they owned temples at Har-ki-Pairi, shops, pilgrim rest houses, and land used for commercial and festival purposes.[94] The Udasis were centered in Kankhal and were the major landowners there, according to the 1909 *Saharanpur District Gazetteer* (256, 127–28). As late as 1921, the District Settlement Report listed ascetics as the district's third largest landowners, with 13,337 acres (Drake-Brockman 1921: 48).[95] They seem to have maintained their position up to the abolition of *zamindari* ("landed estates") in 1950, but the most recent gazetteer describes these estates in the past tense (SDG 1981: 103).[96]

*Sanyasi*s also exercised influence in city government, belying the stereotype of detachment from worldly affairs. The 1892 Mahavaruni inquiry identifies the *mahant* of Raiwala, Balwant Gir, as the municipal commissioner. A year later, board members who voted to levy a permanent pilgrim tax to fund sanitary improvements included two *sanyasi mahant*s: Bhem Narain was the secretary, and Jaydayal Gir was a member (HMI Oct. 1893: 13).[97] In 1924, *mahant* Kanh Das was appointed to a committee to advise the government on matters relating to Hardwar's development (SDG 1924: 21).[98] Although landowning status may have given ascetics local influence, they clearly also took an active role in shaping policy.

The *mahant*s' refusal to join the Sanatana Dharma Sabha clearly illustrates these groups' differing interests. The *panda*s formed the Sabha after train booking was suspended for festivals in May and June 1897; they were trying to prevent these suspensions from happening again, given their financial losses. As property owners, ascetics depended far less on pilgrim gifts than the *panda*s. The *mahant*s' refusal probably also reflected ideas of heightened ascetic

status—both of the *akhara*s as self-governing corporate bodies and, more generally, of ascetics as spiritually superior to householders. Such attitudes would have worked against ascetics compromising their independence by joining a "*panda* organization," and several later events confirm this sense of separateness. When some *panda*s assaulted two doctors responsible for plague operations in 1898, the *mahant*s met the investigating officer at the train station, where they "disclaimed having any grievance against the plague administration and bewailed the conduct of the Jwalapur men" (HMI April 1898: 5). The government also respected ascetic autonomy by working through their established lines of authority, as with sanitary arrangements at Kumbha Melas in 1891 and 1903, and the report for the latter specifically lauds their cooperation (HMI Sept. 1903: 7). Such public deference by the authorities reinforced the *mahant*s' traditional authority and was the surest way to ensure their wholehearted cooperation with the sanitary measures.

In Defense of the Ganges

Twentieth-century Hardwar's sharpest conflict was the controversy surrounding the new headworks for the Upper Ganges Canal, which first erupted in 1914 and resurfaced even more intensely two years later. The conflicts in the 1890s had been local affairs largely rooted in questions of money, but this latter controversy was sparked by a more abstract religious goal—the struggle to maintain the unfettered flow of the Ganges. In the largest sense, this was a Hindu effort to retain control over a sacred site and to resist what they saw as colonial efforts to diminish it. The conflict galvanized Hindu reaction throughout India, which ultimately led the authorities to seek a compromise. Out of this conflict also came the Ganga Sabha ("Ganges Assembly"), a *panda* organization still highly visible in Hardwar, although its real influence is debatable. The pivotal figure in the 1916 controversy and in organizing the Ganga Sabha was the Indian nationalist icon Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya.

The only detailed sources for this conflict come from the Home Ministry records in the National Archives of India, but different parties portray it very differently. The Home Ministry sources predictably characterize it as an "agitation" and allege that religious outrage was less important than the desire to harass the government. Malviya's biographer Parmanand emphasizes the struggle against an arbitrary colonial power and also seeks to promote Pandit Malviya's legacy. The Ganga Sabha's contemporary version of this story gives Hardwar's *panda*s a greater role than any of the other sources.[99] Despite these differences in interpretation, there is considerable agreement on the basic facts.

The story begins in 1856, with the opening of the Upper Ganges Canal. This project had widened and deepened the small branch of the Ganges that ran past the town to serve as the canal's supply channel, but this new channel had one intractable problem. It was much shallower than the river's main channel, which meant that the supply channel was virtually dry when the river's water level fell during the hot season. For many years, the authorities addressed this by building temporary barriers to divert water into the supply channel. These barriers could not be built until the water level fell in November and would then be washed away by the floods in the following year (HMI Oct. 1916: 1). Such seasonal fluctuations were calamitous for farmers, who were unable to irrigate the last part of their autumn crop (*kharif*), or to prepare the fields for the spring crop (*rabi*). Since in 1913 alone agricultural losses were estimated at five million rupees, it is easy to see why the government desired to ensure a more regular water supply.

Government engineers first proposed replacing these temporary barriers with two permanent weirs but in 1913 shifted their focus to a location requiring only one weir. This new weir would direct water into the canal through a new supply channel cut through Laljiwala Island, with levees on the nearby islands to prevent them from being flooded. British sources claim that from the start the government had been sensitive to local concerns and had encountered no opposition. Nor had there been objections to earlier engineering projects, such as supplying the Bhim Ghoda pool through an underground canal, or supplying the Kankhal *ghat*s with water passed through the Mayapur Dam, or to the Narora headworks of the Lower Ganges Canal, where the Ganges had been completely controlled since 1878. In describing the project's initial stages, one canal officer rightly noted that local people were very happy with the Canal Department, since the latter had carried out the improvements to Har-ki-Pairi and Bhim Ghoda and had also built most of Hardwar's *ghat*s. This officer reported that the only initial concern was whether the project would affect the water supply to the bathing places, and when the locals were assured that it would not, they raised no objections (HMI Oct. 1916: 2).[100]

This same report notes that local authorities were again consulted when the proposed location was changed, with the same result: the *panda*s had no objections once they learned that the improvements would ensure enhanced water to the *ghat*s during the entire year. Government documents thus stress the government's care to gauge public sentiment for this project, and it seemed to be under the impression that there would be no objections.

Parmanand gives a different account of this initial phase. He reports that the *panda*s sensed some danger from the first plan but were happy when the government assured them that it would increase the water supply. He then

charges that the British used bait-and-switch tactics, first by changing the location of the works but, more important, by changing their nature—from permanent weirs that were merely sturdier versions of the temporary ones to a masonry dam with a spillway and control gates. In doing this, they ignored that Hindus would resent this obstruction to the free flow of the Ganges (1985: 245–46).

All was quiet until a public meeting in Hardwar in June 1914, after which Dehra Dun's *mahant* Lakshman Das sent a telegram expressing "intense pain and alarm" at the plan to dam the Ganges. Parmanand admits that "the project of the Bhimgoda weir and regulator furnished a convenient battle cry for the Hindu leader and politician" (1985: 247)—that is, that political considerations played a significant role in this conflict—and from the start, the British gave these the greatest weight. The government viewed this conflict as a political agitation stirred up by outsiders, especially since the locals had been initially indifferent. Despite this, the authorities also realized that they could not ignore this situation, and that even though the demand for free flow was not immediately important to many pilgrims, it was a demand that "could be stirred up by agitation" (HMI Oct. 1916: 2).

The initial controversy arose only a few months before the 1915 Kumbha Mela, and Lieutenant Governor Sir James Meston moved quickly to defuse it. In November 1914, he called a group of "leading Hindu gentlemen" to a conference at Hardwar, where he explained the nature of the works and listened to their objections. At the end, both parties agreed on three points: that the original channel feeding the Hardwar *ghat*s (Supply Channel Number One) would be left exactly as it was, that the weir would have an opening through which some nominal amount of water could freely flow, and that the new channel through Laljiwala Island would be an unlined natural cut, with neither the name nor the appearance of a canal (HMI Oct. 1916: 2–3).

The controversy appeared to have been defused, except that the two sides seem to have understood the second and third conditions very differently. At the conference, Sir James Meston asked the Maharaja of Jaipur how large an opening would be sufficient to ensure free flow, and the latter had responded by extending his arms. Sir James seems to have understood the maharaja as speaking for the entire Hindu community rather than giving his own opinion, and here he was gravely mistaken (HMI April 1917: 7–8).[101] A more serious problem arose from the third condition, that the new channel would not have the appearance of a canal. The British understood this as applying only to the supply channel itself and never imagined that the dam would be attacked as giving the project the look of a canal. Here the authorities were sadly mistaken, for when Hindus realized that the authorities proposed to control the Ganges completely,

the protests—respectively described as an agitation and a *satyagraha* (civil disobedience campaign)—erupted with renewed vigor (Parmanand 1985: 248).

The first rumblings of trouble came in June 1916, with a complaint to the canal authorities by Lala Sukhbir Singh, a Muzaffarnagar district landowner who had taken part in the 1914 protest and was the general secretary of the All-India Hindu Sabha. The Maharaja of Jaipur sent a similar letter in July to protest the masonry works and the insufficient opening. In both cases, the government merely reaffirmed its commitment to the 1914 agreement (HMI April 1917: 8–9). On September 7, the government received a protest from the Ganga Hindu Sabha, expressing their "deep regret and disappointment" that the Public Works Department was building a dam with gates, despite the promise that the works would have neither the name nor the appearance of a canal, and that the opening for "free flow" was only a five-foot space at the top. They demanded that the government completely abandon construction of the headworks and that it ensure the river's unrestricted flow by leaving a thirty-foot-wide opening down to the natural riverbed. They also demanded a similar opening at Narora on the Lower Ganges Canal, an issue that had never been raised before (HMI Oct. 1916: 6).

Government officials had technical and political objections to these demands. Engineers pointed out that the current from such a large opening would undermine the adjoining weirs and that the canal regulator and masonry works were needed to control the flow of water to the canal (HMI Oct. 1916: 3). Some officials contended that the protesters were reneging on their earlier agreement and warned that appeasement would only encourage further demands. Yet others were able to look past the petition's technical drawbacks and recognize the underlying issues. One member of the executive council rightly noted that "politics are at the bottom of it, but it does not follow, from that fact, that we can brush aside the objections" (HMI Oct. 1916: 4).

This was an astute assessment, for the petitioners had put tremendous pressure on the government. The Ganga Hindu Sabha had sent its petition not only to the government but also to many of India's ruling princes and to the All-India Hindu Sabha (HMI Oct. 1916: 6–7).[102] Enlisting royal support was a powerful strategic gambit, particularly during wartime. Pandit Malviya and Lala Sukhbir Singh had visited the Maharaja of Jaipur in summer 1916 to inform him of the situation, and in November 1916, they presented their case to the Princes' Conference in Delhi, where according to the government's summary of the matter, they were informed that "a very serious insult was being offered to their religious susceptibilities" (HMI April 1917: 9).

This ferment culminated on 5 December 1916, when the All-India Hindu Sabha issued a proclamation from Hardwar (HMI April 1917: 1). It began by

acknowledging the benefits of irrigation canals and expressing gratitude for them, but then argued that the government should also respect Hindu veneration for the Ganges. The Sabha had no complaint regarding the first condition in the 1914 agreement, leaving Supply Channel Number One in its natural state; their distress stemmed from their differing understanding of the other two conditions—that is, that the project would not have the name or appearance of a canal and that the river would have sufficient free flow. This proclamation was signed by influential Hindus from all over India—judges, doctors, lawyers, honorary members of the Legislative Council, and two of the Shankaracharyas—and the combined pressure of the ruling princes and these influential men finally goaded the government into action. After consulting with the Maharaja of Jaipur, Sir James Meston invited the ruling princes, the All-India Hindu Sabha's officeholders, and all the participants in the 1914 conference to a second conference at Hardwar on December 18–19 in 1916, to find a solution acceptable to all parties.

At the conference, both sides took pains to deny that the other had acted in bad faith. The petitioners claimed that they had misunderstood the government's position on these two points, and the government seems to have accepted this at face value.[103] Lieutenant Governor Meston showed the petitioners a scale model of the works, walked them around the construction site, and gave each attendee a chance to register his opinion. These opinions ran the full spectrum—the Maharaja of Kasimbazar wanted the Ganges to flow freely from the Himalayas to the sea, whereas Rao Giriraj Singh had no objection to the proposed headworks, since farmers needed the water. Yet most of the opinions lay between these two—recognizing the need for some type of construction, yet reluctant to control the Ganges completely (HMI April 1917: 18–19, 23–24, 27).

In the end, there were three possible solutions. Two were variations on the proposed works: the first called for keeping some regulator bays permanently open and others permanently closed, and the second called for some bays to be permanently open and other bays to be gates that could be opened and closed. The final alternative was to excavate an entirely new supply channel on Rori Island, across from the town, so that canal water would not mingle with the water at the *ghat*s. The government engineers favored this last choice, since it would provide the canal with a completely controlled supply, but since its projected cost was 2–2.5 million rupees, Sir James decreed that it would be employed only as a last resort (HMI Apr. 1917: 9, 20).

The two sides eventually agreed on the first alternative—to leave some bays permanently open, and others permanently closed—although the canal department reserved the right to close the open bays temporarily in an emergency. These open bays were little different from a bridge resting on piers, to which

the petitioners had no objection. The parties also agreed that Hardwar's *ghat*s would receive 1,000 cubic feet of water per second and that Kankhal would receive 200 cubic feet per second, the latter coming from the Mayapur dam.[104] These proposals were accepted by both parties, and Sir James Meston pointed out that this settlement was supplementary to the 1914 agreement, ensuring that there would be no further disagreements. He also noted that the agreement contained no reference to Narora, a strategy that allowed him to divide these two issues, since the government was extremely reluctant to grant free flow at Narora (HMI April 1917: 28, Oct. 1916: 3).[105]

As Sir James freely admitted in his final statement, the government's urge to compromise had been strongly driven by political considerations—this was the middle of World War I, and the government wanted a quick and amicable settlement. He acknowledged that the settlement was less than ideal from an engineering perspective but recognized the reverence with which Hindus regarded the Ganges, "which it would be most inexpedient to array against Government at any time and more especially at present" (HMI April 1917: 10).

This agreement ended the public dispute, but it was followed by sharp disagreement within the government, outside the public eye. Certain officials seem to have been deeply resentful—toward Hindus, for their newfound reverence for the Ganges, and toward the government, for accepting a technically deficient solution. This faction actively lobbied for the third alternative, to excavate a completely new supply channel. From an engineering perspective, this was clearly the best alternative, but their recommendation has a spiteful tone—it noted that the first bridges built over the rivers had also been considered sacrilegious, and had the government heeded those objections, "we should still have been at the stage of ferries across our rivers" (HMI April 1917: 2). The report then urges the government to make Hindus demonstrate the depth of their newfound convictions by requiring them to raise the funds to excavate the new supply canal.

At the conference, the cost estimate for this option had been 2–2.5 million rupees, but these officials produced a revised estimate totaling a mere 800,000 rupees. The original estimate was done on demand and may well have been inaccurate, but a threefold cost reduction seems hard to accept. Parmanand raises similar suspicions, noting that the construction would have required two miles of excavation. This estimate may have been set intentionally low to gain government approval, with the assumption that once the work had begun, the government would find the funds to complete it. As Parmanand describes it, the engineering minions aggressively pursued this option, alarming the Hardwar community, until Sir James Meston reaffirmed his support for the original plan (1985: 258–59).

The final controversy, during the 1927 Kumbha Mela, contested the government's unilateral authority to regulate the Mela. The lightning rod for this disagreement was the Officer's Bridge, a narrow bridge that spanned the sacred pool at Har-ki-Pairi, which at its highest point was only three feet above the water level. This bridge had been a regular feature at Har-ki-Pairi, although it had been removed during the monsoon each year, but after objections at the 1922 Ardha Kumbha Mela, the municipal board had decided to use it only during big festivals and render it unusable at other times by removing the floorboards. This bridge's sole purpose was crowd control, since it placed officials immediately above the bathers, where the officials could be easily heard. Hindus objected to this proximity on several different grounds, and protesters contended that crowd control would be just as efficient from the concrete island opposite Har-ki-Pairi, which had been built about 1915 (GAD 231/1926 Box 462: 24).

The initial objection came in November 1926 from the Ganga Sabha, Hardwar's *panda* organization. The Sabha informed W. Christie, the Kumbha Mela's officer-in-charge, that it offended their religious sensibilities when people wore leather shoes on the bridge, since the bridge spanned the sacred pool. When Christie explained why the bridge was necessary on major bathing days, the Sabha said it would provide nonleather shoes for the bridge personnel. Christie replied that he would have to check with the Inspector-General of police, since these shoes were not regulation footgear, but the latter refused to accept them, which Christie conveyed to the Sabha in January 1927. The Ganga Sabha responded that it would meet with the Inspector-General in person, but it seems that this meeting never happened, since the Sabha disappears from the official record (GAD 231/1926, Box 462: 24–25).

The Officer's Bridge remained a bone of contention as the Kumbh grew near, and its primary opponent was Pandit Malviya, who had been a major figure in the campaign against the Bhim Ghoda weir eleven years earlier. Malviya commanded respect not only because he was vice president of the Hindu Mahasabha, but also because he was president of the Sanatan Dharma Maha-Sammelan—an organization that had provided thousands of volunteers for the 1915 Kumbha Mela (when the war had rendered the British desperately short of manpower) and was doing so again in 1927. These volunteers were crucial to the Mela's success, and as the issue heated up, the administration worried that these volunteers would abandon their posts to take action against the government.

Whereas the Ganga Sabha had objected to the officers' footwear, Malviya's stated purpose was to protect the privacy of women bathers at Brahmakund. As Malviya noted in a letter to Christie, the Mela supervisor, since "even those women who have full dhotis over their bodies will, when they bathe, have their bodies very much exposed," he described the use of the bridge by "any officer,

Indian or European, . . . [as] calculated deeply to offend Hindu sentiment" (GAD 231/1926, Box 462, serial 15: 23). Malviya first raised this matter in March 1927, when he came to Hardwar for the Gurukul Kangri's Silver Jubilee Celebration, and suggested that the crowds could be managed from a platform on the concrete island. In conversations with the other Mela officials, Christie insisted that this was impractical, but Divisional Commissioner Oakden seemed to think that the bridge was unnecessary. The latter wrote Malviya to ask if there would be any objection to a platform on the island, and this led Malviya to believe that his proposal had been accepted. Given this expectation, he was shocked and angry to see the bridge when he returned to Hardwar on 3 April, particularly when he learned that at least half a dozen people—far more than necessary for crowd control—had watched the crowd from the bridge on the Amavasya (new moon) bathing day on April 2.[106] From that moment, he insisted on the bridge's complete removal. In a letter to the United Provinces Governor on 9 April, Malviya threatened a *satyagraha* (civil disobedience campaign) to prevent bridge access, and the officials understood this to mean that teams of volunteers—the same volunteers who were essential to running the Mela—would lie down in front of the bridge, from which they would have to be removed by force (GAD 231/1926 Box 465 Serial #15: 22–23).

Rattled by the escalating pressure, Christie traveled to Allahabad for an emergency interview with the governor, arriving on 10 April.[107] Christie insisted that the bridge was necessary for crowd control, but the governor disagreed, pointing out that it might be possible to control the crowds from the platform. The governor ordered the authorities to attempt to control the crowds from the island and to use the bridge if and only if this became impossible. This concession persuaded Pandit Malviya of the government's good intentions, although he noted that Hindus would be completely satisfied only when the bridge was completely removed, and he expressed regrets that the government had neglected the opportunity to respect Hindu religious sentiments (GAD 231/1926 Box 465 Serial #15: 25). During the Kumbh bathing day on 13 April, officers used the bridge when it was necessary to clear the pool, but after this went back to the island, as stated in the governor's orders. There were no protests with regard to the bridge, and it was completely removed before the Ardha Kumbha Mela in 1933.

One clear cause of this conflict was poor communication—Pandit Malviya thought that the government had agreed to remove the bridge and was upset at what he saw as a broken promise. Yet it also reflects the struggle for control over Hardwar, even with regard to seemingly insignificant things, and this struggle cut both ways. Christie's immediate superior, H. R. Nevill, noted that the officials in charge had "made it a question of prestige" and thus blown the

matter out of proportion (GAD 231/1926 Box 465 [April 1929] Serial #15: 28). The 1927 Kumbha Mela was the first time that a single person had been appointed as the Mela overseer, and Christie's refusal to consider other traffic control alternatives—despite his colleagues' differing opinions—may have reflected both his desire to demonstrate that he was in charge and his worries about how a disaster could affect his career.

Although never explicitly stated, the Officer's Bridge also seems to have been a prestige issue for Malviya as well. His letters to the authorities continually allege "damage to Hindu sentiments," and although Malviya's complaint to Christie stressed the officers' proximity to bathing women, other sources seem to indicate that the problem was the bridge itself. Shortly before the conflict's resolution, Malviya informed Police Chief Measures that his fundamental objection was to the bridge "where it is at the height at which it is and to the presence of anyone … over the heads of hundreds of thousands of people" (GAD 231/1926 Box 465 Serial #15: 23). In lobbying to remove it, Malviya was trying to assert greater Hindu control over the Mela site and perhaps augment his own prestige as well. This desire to create and maintain boundaries reflects the growing assertiveness of Indian nationalism. This same assertiveness may have been responsible for what one official characterized as the "independence, intractability, and general want of co-operation with authority" that he noticed during the festival (GAD 231/1926 Box 465 Serial #15: 30).

Yet despite Malviya's claims about speaking for "Hindu sentiments," the community was actually divided on it. The *akhara*s supported the Officer's Bridge, since it advanced their interests: it helped officials clear the pool more efficiently and thus helped keep their bathing processions on schedule.[108] Others opposed the bridge on more practical grounds, since it enclosed the Brahmakund and restricted the traffic flow into the bathing area. This latter consideration seems to have carried the day with the government, especially since several officials believed that the island platform constructed in 1915 rendered the bridge unnecessary. All of these considerations show that Malviya's claim to speak for all Hindus was not completely true and that community opinions ran on a much wider spectrum. Yet this and the previous conflict clearly show that for many Hindus, asserting control over the Ganges and their religious festivals was a powerful symbolic issue.

Recent Trends

The new Bhim Ghoda weir ensured a constant water supply to Hardwar's bathing places, the *ghat*s themselves had been upgraded at considerable expense,

and the railroad facilitated convenient transportation. All the pieces were in place for Hardwar's development, and it grew steadily throughout the twentieth century. The city's physical expansion is easy to document, since many recent buildings bear plaques dating their construction, and these clearly show that the city exploded in the 1930s. Hardwar's two most desirable areas are the main road and the Ganges—the former as a commercial site, and the latter for its proximity to the sacred river. These two areas have seventeen buildings from that decade, including many of the massive *dharamshala*s (pilgrim rest houses) that are among Hardwar's most notable architecture.[109] The greatest concentration of these is the eight *dharamshala*s clustered on the main road, all of which were built by private donors within a few years of each other. Several factors probably lay behind this burst of construction. One was that Hardwar was gradually becoming a genuine city, rather than a riverside pilgrimage town, and people were seizing the opportunity to build on fast-disappearing prime land. A more significant factor was probably the growing importance of the Kumbha Mela, which became progressively larger through the twentieth century and which by 1927 projected a more assertive nationalism.[110] As the Kumbha Mela became larger and more important—politically, economically, and symbolically—people became more eager to take part in it and to have a place at which they could stay in Hardwar. One *dharamshala* near the Ganges was inaugurated on the primary bathing day in 1938, and several nearby buildings were built during the previous year.

After the 1930s, construction sharply declined in the city center, doubtless due to the shortage of buildable land. One factor behind this shortage is the city's constricted geography, but another was that much of the land was owned by religious organizations—*ashram*s, *math*s, and *dharamshala*s—that were unlikely to part with their property. Land ownership in the city's core has been very stable, which means that in each era the new construction has been at the city's edges, which have continued to expand. The oldest sections are in the core area close to Har-ki-Pairi, which remains Hardwar's ritual center.

Geographical expansion was one marker of Hardwar's growth as an urban center, but another has been its development as a center of learning. Whereas places such as Varanasi have a long tradition as both intellectual centers and pilgrimage sites, Hardwar's traditional importance has been solely as a bathing place. Developing educational institutions was a major step to raise Hardwar's prestige as a pilgrimage place and Hindu cultural center. The 1981 *District Gazetteer* lists eighteen such schools in Hardwar and Kankhal, ranging from the Basti Ram Sanskrit Pathshala, established in 1870, to the Nigagaman Sanskrit Vidyalaya, established in 1967. With few exceptions, these schools have fifty students or less and no more than five teachers.

They are all affiliated with the Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishva Vidyalaya, Varanasi (SDG 1981: 289–90).

Hardwar's oldest and best-known institution for higher learning, the Gurukul Kangri Vishvavidyalaya (Gurukul Kangri University), was established in 1902 by the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj was a Hindu response to the changes sweeping over nineteenth-century Indian society, and its founder, Swami Dayananda, sought to create a religious practice based on the Vedas as the final authority. This stance allowed him to attack as corrupt and illegitimate many of the "evils" plaguing nineteenth-century Hindu life—child marriages, *sati*, image worship, the caste system, and a ban on widow remarriage. Hardwar seems to be an unlikely site for an Arya Samaj institution, given the group's disdain for traditional religious practices such as pilgrimage, and it was established there only because the Arya Samaj received a land grant from the *rais* ("chieftain") of Bijnor (Sharma 1976: 23). In its infancy, the Gurukul's educational style reflected the Arya Samaj's militant reformism. During their sixteen-year course of study, the boys could neither send nor receive mail, nor could they go home, although their parents could visit once a month. The headmaster, Rama Deva, defended such strictness as "their only hope of preserving the boys from child-marriage, maternal ignorance, and the evils of cities" (Nevinson 1975: 308). From this austere beginning, the Gurukul has mellowed considerably, doubtless reflecting the Arya Samaj's gradual assimilation into the larger Hindu society. As this has happened, the Gurukul has largely lost its sectarian character and, for all practical purposes, has become Hardwar's local university.

Yet in the early twentieth century, the Arya Samaj was mounting a sustained challenge to traditional Hindu practices as it sought to promote a modern religious practice based solely on the Vedas. One piece of evidence for this challenge is their bitingly satirical pamphlets, such as *Tirtha Darpana, Panda Arpana* ("The Essence of Pilgrimage Places [is] Offerings to *Panda*s"), whose vitriolic tone clearly shows that this was no simple academic debate. In 1906, traditional Hindus responded by establishing the Rishikul, which was founded "to teach Sanskrit and impart instruction in the tenets of the Sanatan Dharma" (Parmanand 1985: 243).[111] One of the Rishikul's prominent supporters was Pandit Malviya, who was the first person to donate money toward the school and a member of the instruction committee for many years. The Rishikul still survives as a hospital and Ayurvedic College, and later sources show that Sanatani Hindus have continued to support it.[112]

These traditional Hindu sentiments were also expressed in other contexts, as one might expect in a conservative religious milieu. The 1981 *District Gazetteer* describes several processions supporting the independence struggle and it

reports that the Gurukul was a center for nationalist activities (SDG 1981: 72–74). In his brief history of Hardwar, Sharma reports that during the 1918 Cow Protection Movement, four people were hanged, nine sent to the Andaman Islands, and two hundred given jail terms ranging from two to seven years. People were also jailed for resisting the British in 1930, 1940, and 1942 (Sharma 1996: 327). Hardwar also has a long history as a center for pan-Hindu movements. The first began with Swami Dayananda's preaching at the 1867 Kumbha Mela, which was surely an excellent venue to publicize his ideas, although this same message inveighed against practices such as holy baths. Even more important, at the 1915 Kumbha Mela, Hardwar was the founding site for the Hindu Mahasabha, and it remained the movement's headquarters until 1925. The Mahasabha initially emphasized Hindu hot-button issues such as cow protection, but in the 1930s developed into a Hindu nationalist organization that opposed both the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress (McKean 1996: 67–70).

One reason the Mahasabha chose Hardwar for its headquarters in 1915 was surely the influence of Pandit Malviya, who was highly respected in Hardwar, was the Mahasabha's vice president, and presided over the organization coordinating the volunteers for the 1915 Kumbha Mela. Yet there were other compelling reasons for the Mahasabha—or, for that matter, later organizations such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)—to center themselves in Hardwar. Hardwar's small size makes it relatively easy to set up and run an organization, especially if the organization has influential local supporters. The city's small size also makes it easier for any group to create a higher public presence. Hardwar's residents are generally conservative—religiously, socially, and politically—and were thus largely amenable to the Mahasabha's stated goals. This was also true for later movements in the 1990s, as discussed in greater detail in the conclusion. During that time, Hardwar was the site for several national meetings convened by the VHP, a Hindu religious organization, and during that same decade, Hardwar's residents solidly supported the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a political party whose goals and organization were largely congruent with the VHP's. Finally, even in 1915, Hardwar was less than a day's travel from Delhi and had excellent rail connections with the capital. This proximity made it an ideal location for any politically active organization.

Hardwar was profoundly affected by the demographic changes unleashed by Partition. The city has close historical ties with the Punjab, and many Punjabi Hindus settled in Hardwar after fleeing from Pakistan.[113] These Punjabi immigrants have not only swelled the town's population but also shifted its social and economic balance. Punjabis are stereotyped as hardworking and cunning businessmen, whereas Hardwar's natives are described as more relaxed, if not

actually lazy. Regardless of whether one accepts these stereotypes, the immigrants were extremely industrious. This may have simply reflected their determination to rebuild their lives, but it has been reflected in their economic success.[114] Punjabis now own many of Hardwar's businesses, including hotels and restaurants, and although they do not yet control the city's economy, they are clearly very important. Their numbers further increased in the 1980s, as Punjabi Hindus fled the unrest in the Punjab fueled by the Sikh dreams of Khalistan.

Hardwar has grown steadily since then. According to census data, the Hardwar urban area's population grew by 52 percent in 1971, 60 percent in 1981, 32 percent in 1991, and 18 percent in 2001.[115] Its explosive growth in those first two decades can be partly attributed to the opening of Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (B.H.E.L.)—a large industrial enterprise that functions as a town in its own right—but another important factor has been the ongoing increase in Himalayan tourism. Better roads, bridges, and other infrastructural improvements—not to mention the marked increase in private auto ownership—have greatly expanded visitor traffic in this region, which peaks during the school holidays in May and June. Most of this traffic passes directly through Hardwar—the traditional gateway to the Himalayas—and travelers usually stop there for a few days, if only to arrange their onward travel. Hardwar is also the major transit point for goods going up to the mountains, so its middlemen get their commission from this as well. The city's importance as the gateway to the hills has only increased with the creation of Uttarakhand state in 2000. Hardwar is one of the new state's few real cities, has one of its few rail connections, and according to one on-the-street estimate in 2005, produced 68 percent of Uttarakhand's revenue.

As the city has grown, its important sites have been continually renovated and restored (see Figure 3.3). Har-ki-Pairi has been expanded twice since the British first built the new *ghat* in the 1820s. The first of these came before the 1938 Kumbha Mela, when several buildings were demolished to enlarge the *ghat*, the *ghat* itself was paved with marble, several new temples were built, and the other temples completely renovated. The *ghat* was again enlarged for the 1986 Kumbha Mela—by demolishing a large building known as Jammu Bhavan—and the Hinduja Foundation also donated 3.5 million rupees to construct a ladies' bathing enclosure at Har-ki-Pairi's north end. The bathing area is now magnificently large, and visitors are unaware that for most of its history it was small and congested, as photographs and contemporary descriptions clearly attest (Forbes 1939: 12).

Aside from Har-ki-Pairi, Hardwar's other major temples have all seen complete restoration or extensive construction: Daksha Mahadev in 1962, Maya



FIGURE 3.3. Har-ki-Pairi panorama, August 1996. The steps in the foreground were constructed in 1986 after an existing building was demolished; the oldest section (dating from the 1820s) runs in a semicircle behind the central temple group. The stalls in the center foreground are where Hardwar's *pandas* can meet their clients. In fall 1997, renovation work began on the domed temple at far left—renovations that included replacing the dome with a spire—but the construction was halted by a lawsuit, which is still in court.

Devi in 1943; Mansa Devi in 1945, 1954, and 1984; Bilvakeshvar in 1960, 1986, and throughout the 1990s (when a major patron was film composer Gulshan Kumar); and Bhairav Akhara in 1956 and 1988. In many cases, renovation is ongoing, and donations are always welcome. The temple owners' piety has played some part in these renovations, but there are also undeniable economic imperatives: pilgrims are more likely to visit an attractive, nicely appointed temple, and such temples find it easier to attract donors for further projects.[116] Another identifiable trend is the construction of large ashrams north of the city on the road to Rishikesh. These ashrams have various attractions to generate traffic and patronage, from scriptural tableaux (*jhankiya*) that display mythological scenes, to oversize images of divinities, to a replica of the pilgrim road to Jammu's Vaishno Devi shrine. The continuing construction of such ashrams—further and further from the city center—shows that Hardwar's religious market is still expanding, and it will probably do so for the foreseeable future.

Two factors feeding this expansion have been Hardwar's rise as a tourist destination in its own right, and the growing numbers of people buying second

homes in the region—both of which have greatly increased traffic. In many ways, Hardwar still feels like a small town, and its environs retain the beauty that early British travelers described so rapturously. It is also an easy day's journey from Delhi, and many wealthier Delhi residents are buying land or apartments there as a refuge from their crowded, dangerous, and polluted city. A few miles north of Hardwar, billboards advertise the sites for future apartment complexes, and in 1990, advertisements for one of these complexes, the Ganga Darshan Apartments, repeatedly appeared in the *Hindustan Times*, a national newspaper.

These apartments' high prices (in 1990, 150,000 rupees for a one-bedroom apartment) and their modern amenities (high-speed elevators, on-premises shopping, twenty-four-hour security, and possession in time for the 1992 Kumbha Mela) indicate that they were not intended for ordinary Indians but as vacation homes for the affluent. Their advertisements were always careful to stress Hardwar's holiness, and this seems to be invoked as one more feature to help sell the product—the spiritual equivalent of wall-to-wall carpeting. The predictable effect of this pressure has been to intensify the demand for land—already limited because of Hardwar's geography—and to drive land prices even higher. Both of these trends will certainly continue. Land pressures are further attested by the growing number of tear-downs in the city center, in which an existing building is demolished to build a larger one in its place. These pressures, which have significantly affected modern Hardwar, are discussed at greater length in the final chapter.

4

The Life and Times of a Pilgrim City

This book is a study in perspectives. The sources for the two previous chapters each give a distinct perspective on Hardwar, and each remains important to understand it now. The texts discussed in chapter 2 provide the mythic charter and images establishing Hardwar's religious importance as a holy place. Some of these are still vital for both local people and pilgrims, and the MPM is still an important source text for writers. The information in chapter 3, which focused on Hardwar's historical development, is virtually invisible in Hardwar's daily life. Local people are largely unaware of it, except as it intersects their own history. These two perspectives provide context for understanding the workings of modern Hardwar, and such context is clearly necessary to talk about any changes in Hardwar itself. Yet in keeping with my ultimate goal—to move from the particular to the general—the attention to this particular context eventually leads into wider considerations on Hindu pilgrimage and religious life.

Just as chapters 2 and 3 presented multiple perspectives on Hardwar's past, this and the following chapters present multiple perspectives on the present. The city's life as a pilgrim center revolves around local residents who somehow service the pilgrim trade, in addition to the pilgrim visitors who provide it. Whereas the past two chapters examined texts, the governing image for the following chapters is transactions. In its simplest form, a transaction is some sort of exchange and implies a consensual relationship between parties. Transactional models have proved useful for interpreting

Hindu religious life, and Marriot has described them as the conceptual key unlocking Indian life and society.[1] Regardless of whether one accepts such broad claims, the transactional model's basic structure—giving and getting—can apply to all sorts of situations, including the marketplace.[2]

According to Marriot, the virtue of this model is that it avoids imposed categories such as sacred and secular and thus provides a way to understand Indian society as an organic whole (Marriot 1976: 113). This is particularly important in a place such as Hardwar, where religion and business often overlap. This overlap has a long history, since for many years, the spring bathing fair drew people for commercial as well as religious reasons, and it continues today. Hardwar's local economy is rooted in its status as a holy place, which generates demand for goods and services—both ordinary things, such as rooms, meals, and souvenirs, and things with more overt religious significance. Both sets of services generate real income, but the things "for sale" in the latter—religious merit and the removal of karmic demerit—are less tangible than most commodities, and one is more clearly at risk for fraud. Yet these intangible transactions—based on received notions about the nature of holy places, the appropriate types of actions in such places, and the sorts of benefits these actions can bring—lie at the heart of Hardwar's importance. These ideas coincide with the material interests of some local people, but they also have a long history, as the texts cited in chapter 2 clearly show.[3] These ideas also run deeper than individual self-interest and reflect deeply held cultural values—among them the conviction that religious merit cannot be mechanically earned, bought, or sold.[4]

The next four chapters examine religious life in modern Hardwar: the varying sorts of transactions (tangible and intangible), the environments in which these take place, and their "providers" and "consumers." This chapter focuses on Hardwar's everyday economy, particularly on how it is shaped by these intangible transactions. The resident groups most dependent on these transactions are *panda*s and ascetics, who are examined in chapters 5 and 6. Both resident groups transact heavily in intangible benefits, and although some may be getting something for nothing, their continuing vitality is a sign that their services still meet consumers' needs. Chapter 7 looks at their pilgrim clients, and the final chapter examines both changing ideas about pilgrimage itself and the forces driving these changes.

The Seasonal Economy

Hardwar has a long history as a pilgrim center but a much shorter one as an urban center, as chapter 3 described in greater detail. As the city has developed,

the local economy has been bolstered by adding some heavy industry and by the burgeoning population's need for goods and services.[5] Yet now as then, Hardwar's economic bedrock is the pilgrim trade, on which most residents directly or indirectly depend.[6] Most of Hardwar's retail business is directly connected with the pilgrim trade: woolen clothes and blankets, woodcarving, vessels for holding Ganges water, and religious paraphernalia. Hardwar's service businesses are also clearly aimed at a transient population: hotels and guest houses for lodging, restaurants for eating, and travel businesses for arranging tours and transportation to the Himalayas or other destinations. These latter sorts of businesses can, of course, be found in any Indian city, but their concentration in Hardwar clearly shows the city's dependence on the pilgrim trade.[7]

Pilgrim traffic is concentrated between April and October, and this produces the boom-and-bust cycle associated with any seasonal economy. In its season, Hardwar pulses with activity: hotels are filled to bursting, restaurants serve thousands of meals daily, road traffic slows to a crawl, and residents work virtually nonstop. The economy barely sputters in the off-season, when the Himalayan shrines have been closed by snow. Shopkeepers pass their days playing chess and pachisi with their neighbors, and on Wednesdays, the Hardwar market closes completely. The diminished traffic leads many restaurateurs to close between November and March, and hotels, *dharamshala*s, and lodging houses can sit virtually empty for months on end. Although winter in Hardwar can be bitterly cold, it also has the relaxed feel of a populace resting from its labors. And as one would expect, off-season prices are usually dramatically lower.

Hardwar's dependence on the pilgrim trade means that local businesses are extremely sensitive to any factors influencing pilgrim traffic. After all, successfully anticipating pilgrim fluctuations materially affects one's livelihood, and prices are often revised in light of anticipated demand. This particularly applies to rooms, since demand varies not only through the year but also in some cases from day to day.[8]

According to local people, the season "officially" begins with the mid-April Baisakhi festival; in Indian astrological reckoning, this marks the sun's entry into Aries, and it is the traditional beginning of the Hindu solar year. In earlier times, this festival was the occasion for Hardwar's annual fair, as well as the beginning of the Himalayan pilgrimage season—since by the time the pilgrims had walked from Hardwar to these shrines, the snow in the mountains would have melted enough to make them accessible. Better transportation has slightly changed this pattern—bringing a brief dip in pilgrim traffic between Baisakhi and the end of April, when travel to the hills begins in earnest—but this festival remains extremely popular, especially with pilgrims from the Punjab.[9]

Hardwar's economic pulse quickens in late April, stimulated by the opening of the Himalayan shrines.[10] Hardwar is the gateway to these shrines, and pilgrims bound there usually spend a few days in Hardwar, both to make onward travel arrangements and to visit local sites. Himalayan pilgrim traffic tends to begin gradually—in some years, travel in the early part of the season is blocked by late snowfalls, and nights in the mountains can be bitterly cold—but it quickly gathers momentum. The peak season lasts from early May until the monsoon's arrival in early July; this period largely coincides with the school holidays, when families can travel at will. Down on the plains, this is also the height of the hot season, when anyone who is able flees the baking heat for the relative coolness of the hills.

Himalayan travel drops sharply during the monsoon, when washouts and landslides render mountain roads even more dangerous than normal. This decline means that Hardwar gets fewer visitors in July and August, although weekend traffic remains strong, particularly from the neighboring regions.[11] September and October are the "Bengali season," which is almost as busy as the high season in May and June. Bengalis often take extended vacations during the fall Navaratri festival—during which schools close for two weeks, making it possible for families to travel—and many Bengalis come to Hardwar either as their final destination or as the gateway for a fall trip to the Himalayas. Two weeks after Navaratri comes the festival of Diwali, which is marked by large pilgrim crowds from Gujarat state. Diwali more or less marks the season's official end, and after this business declines precipitously.

Hardwar's major seasonal fluctuations are determined by access to the Himalayan shrines, which are open from the end of April until the middle of October; during this period, differing regional groups have well-defined visiting times, as just noted.[12] Yet aside from this predictable seasonal traffic, certain other occasions provide sharp and predictable traffic spikes.[13] Festivals such as the full moon in Kartik (a lunar month falling in October or November) and Makara Sankranti (January 14) may see great numbers of people arrive, bathe, and depart in a single day (see Figure 4.1). More important festivals such as Shivaratri (February–March) and the spring Navaratri (March–April) may generate more sustained traffic, but in both cases, business declines precipitously after the festival. As one might expect, festivals falling during the season—Baisakhi (mid-April), Ganga Dashahara (May–June), Guru Purnima (June–July), the entire lunar month of Shravan (July–August), and the fall Navaratri (September–October)—swell the pilgrim crowds even more, boosting the already heightened commercial tempo to an even more frenzied pace.[14] Aside from these set calendrical festivals, other festivals can occur at any time during the year, such as a solar or lunar eclipse, or a Somavati Amavasya (new



FIGURE 4.1. Festival crowd on Kartik Purnima. Off-season festivals bring sharp spikes in pilgrim traffic, as large numbers of people seek a Ganges bath at a particularly holy time.

moon falling on Monday). These wild-card festivals attract pilgrims in any season, but even more so during the busy season; a in Somavati Amavasya June 2005 allegedly drew 4 million people in a single day.[15]

The most dramatic crowds come during the Kumbha Mela, about which local businessmen speak with palpable longing. Local people tend to ignore the distinction between a full (*purna*) and a half (*ardha*) Kumbha Mela, perhaps because both present unparalleled earning prospects.[16] The holiest moment at Hardwar's Kumbha Mela is the instant when the sun is deemed to enter Aries, but there are many other bathing occasions, and pilgrim traffic tends to be heavy for weeks on either side.[17] A full Kumbha Mela has a precipitous effect on the local economy. The demand for everything is so great that prices skyrocket, and hotels and lodging houses can reap an entire year's earnings from the six-week Mela period.[18]

Aside from being a golden time for business, the Kumbha Mela has had other long-term effects. The previous chapter detailed how the British government's fear of festival epidemics spurred it to improve Hardwar in the 1890s, and this trend still continues. At the most mundane level, the Mela ensures that every six years the entire town is scrubbed sparkling clean and that public facilities such as water, sewers, and electricity are in good working order. The Mela's

infrastructural needs also stimulate a regular cycle of construction, and several large public works, such as Birla *ghat* and the foot bridge across the Ganges at Vishnu *ghat*, have been completed in preparation for a particular Kumbha Mela. For religious institutions, the immense crowds generate patronage to carry out their own construction and renovations, as well as sparking personal connections that can result in more lasting bonds. In this way, the Mela's effects persist far beyond its actual duration, as a stone's ripples continue long after it sinks beneath the water's surface.

Perils and Pitfalls in a Pilgrim Town

Hardwar has a long history as a pilgrim spot and is reckoned as one of India's holy places, but neither of these guarantees a pure and wholesome religious atmosphere. Many residents are not especially pious; they are ordinary people living in a religious economy and, on the whole, are more concerned with providing for their families than with pressing religious questions. Although one can always find people worshipping at temples or bathing in the Ganges, Hardwar's environment often seems far more like a carnival than like a sanctuary: groups of visitors strolling and sightseeing on the *ghat*s, hawkers crying their wares, loudspeakers blaring unrecognizable sounds, and during the busy season, an actual carnival across the Ganges from Har-ki-Pairi, complete with rides and concession stands.[19]

Further smudges on this idealized picture were left by the inevitable reports of Hardwar's evils—corruption and dishonesty, wickedness and immorality, grievous crimes and the most common, trivial frauds. Local residents roundly condemn such misdeeds but do not seem particularly surprised by them, and they seem to be able to accept both that Hardwar is a holy place and that deplorable things happen there every day. To illustrate how such opposites could exist in such close proximity, several people cited a traditional adage, "there is darkness under the lamp" (*dipak ke nice andhera*). The lamp in this proverb is a traditional oil lamp, a cuplike vessel with a twisted wick; such a lamp illuminates everything but its own base, where its own light creates the shadow. In the same way, they suggested, in Hardwar wickedness and holiness could be found side by side.

This description meshes poorly with romanticized ideas about a holy city—ideas I had unconsciously held before I first arrived there—but after digging a little deeper into the history, I realized that I needed to change some of my assumptions about holy cities. At least based on the nineteenth-century accounts of the Hardwar fair, it seems that little has changed over the years. Many of

those writers stressed the fair's religious aspects, but it also clearly had a carnival atmosphere. Every account details the fair's extravagant visual variety, for which the sightseers included British officers and Muslim nobles; one also finds references to troupes of dancing girls, fireworks, and a host of lights and illuminations.[20] These accounts also describe the fair's less wholesome aspects, from prostitution to slave markets to a healthy dose of crime—horse-trading frauds and deceptions, burglary, strong-arm robbery, riots, and murder. These dangers have persisted through the years. The 1909 *District Gazetteer* reports a group of "either real or disguised mendicants of some religious order" operating in the region around Hardwar, whose particular specialty was robbery by poisoning, and a gang with a similar modus operandi worked the 1998 Kumbha Mela.[21] For the unwary, unlucky, or overly trusting, a chance encounter could potentially bring disaster.

Local people are not proud of this darker side but are willing to acknowledge its presence. When my wife and I first arrived in 1989, our landlord was particularly emphatic that Hardwar was a dangerous place, and as proof, he continually referred to the same few incidents: the theft of a VCR, an assault on a foreigner the previous year, and a robbery and murder a few years before that. I later discovered that all his lodgers received similar warnings, since as the local man, it was his duty to ensure that his guests suffered no misfortune during their stay. Despite my initial disbelief, our first year generated more than enough crime to give me a more realistic view of Hardwar's "sanctity": there were several murders, auto and property thefts, the attempted rape of a Japanese tourist, a landgrab on our very street, and various petty crimes and frauds. This realism has been reinforced by subsequent experiences and conversations—references to a "land mafia" controlling development and extorting money from merchants, the matter-of-fact remark that it cost 10,000 rupees to arrange the murder of an "ordinary" person, and viewing a long series of serious and less-serious crimes.

Some of these crimes are commonplace for any city of 200,000, such as when our landlord discovered that his insurance agent had been embezzling his premiums, but certain circumstances clearly foster petty crime. One of these is Hardwar's large transient population, particularly the ascetics camping by the Ganges, who come and go without a trace. Such anonymity reflects the traditional ascetic ideal, as a way to leave behind one's previous identity, but "becoming" an ascetic is also an obvious refuge for a fugitive, as well as a strategy to gain people's confidence. The conflict between ascetic ideals and realities is more fully addressed in chapter 6, but I suspected that many of them would not pass up the chance to commit some crime of opportunity and then disappear without a trace.

Another significant factor is Hardwar's unceasing stream of new arrivals, many of whom are either disoriented or unfamiliar with Hardwar, making them susceptible to deception. As mentioned earlier, Hardwar has a history of robbery by poisoning, and this continues still. My landlord stressed that I should never eat or drink anything given by an unknown person, even if it was claimed to be *prasad* (holy food sanctified by a deity), and this was the most common warning on the public signs and notice boards. I didn't hear about this happening during my initial stay, but the 1998 Kumbha Mela saw a series of such robberies—despite a heavy police presence seeking to prevent it—and at least one of these victims died.

Such spectacular cases are rare, but pilgrims are routinely subject to petty deceptions, shady deals, and inflated prices. This is also a function of Hardwar's environment—shopkeepers have little incentive to cultivate long-term relationships with customers, since repeat business is so unlikely. Just about everyone condemns outright fraud, such as that perpetrated by the peddlers selling "deer musk" and rare *rudraksha* beads far below market prices—the former are scented fur balls, and the latter have been carved from wood.[22] Various merchants stressed the ideal of a "shopkeeper's duty" (*dukandari dharma*)—that is, the obligation to be honest with one's customers, at least in the factual claims about one's merchandise. This is particularly true for shops selling religious items (such as the previously mentioned *rudraksha*s), and many of these stores display signs promising customers a large reward if any of the merchandise is found to be fake.

Yet even "honest" merchants can drive a hard bargain or inflate prices to what they think people will pay. By local standards, both of these practices are fair" because most prices are negotiated, but here, too, merchants can deploy various deceptions to get their price. One merchant employed a very personable ascetic on a commission basis, under the pretense that the ascetic was his guru. From the owner's perspective, this arrangement had many advantages—customers liked and trusted the ascetic and would often pay whatever price the ascetic "dictated" to the owner—all factors that made the ascetic a particularly effective salesman. According to the owner, this arrangement became strained when the ascetic demanded a higher sales commission, and it definitively ended when the owner caught the ascetic selling a "coral" necklace that was actually plastic.[23]

This story highlights the most pervasive way in which residents take advantage of visitors—through secret connections and undisclosed "commissions."[24] At one point during the year, Baba Amarnath, an old ascetic who was extremely helpful to me, contemptuously stated that everyone in Hardwar was a "broker," and my own landlord was a perfect example. On one hand, he paid cycle-rickshaw

and auto-rickshaw drivers a substantial commission to bring clients to his lodging house, and had he not done this, they would have taken them somewhere else. On the other hand, in his lodge's "travel business," he served as an agent for particular bus and taxi owners, who kicked him back a set sum per customer.[25]

In the most charitable understanding, these agents are helping travelers make their arrangements—whether for a hotel, a meal, or a taxi to Badrinath—and such facilitators can admittedly make travel much easier, particularly in the busy season. Yet however much pleasure these agents may get from helping people, their primary motive is to get paid. Further, the places to which they channel their clients are not necessarily the ones with the lowest cost or the best services, but the ones that will pay them for doing so. Finally, this is usually done without openly acknowledging that they are being paid, although many travelers assume this. At the very least, the agent's fee adds a hidden "tax" to the cost of goods and services, and at worst, the unwary and the ignorant can be grossly overcharged.[26]

The Intangible Economy—Giving and Getting

The economy described until now shows structural similarities to almost any other seasonal, tourist economy (e.g., a beach resort). Visitors pay for the goods and services the residents supply, and these transactions entail exchanging one tangible thing (money) for another (goods or services). Yet Hardwar's economy has a further dimension distinguishing it from an ordinary vacation resort, namely, the intangible transactions. These transactions are not empirically verifiable; acquiring religious merit and removing one's sins cannot be measured by conventional means. Yet Hardwar's identity as a holy place is rooted in the conviction that these are genuine transactions and that Hardwar is a particularly efficacious place to transact them. Given these convictions, it is not surprising that Hardwar has a wide range of people contracting in intangible services and that this is an important element in the economy. The sections after this look at the general outlines of this economy and the nonspecialized groups who have managed to carve out a niche in it. The two subsequent chapters are specifically devoted to the *panda*s and ascetics, whose particular roles make them important figures in Hardwar's religious life.

The driving force behind this economy is the emphasis on gift giving (*dan*), which is one of the most common pilgrim acts. Indeed, the most common shorthand expression for pilgrimage rituals is *snan-dan*—that is, a ritual bath (*snan*) followed by gift giving. Giving alms is always meritorious, but the benefits from gifts at places such as Hardwar are deemed immeasurably greater.

This idea has a long history, as the texts cited in chapter 2 bear witness, and it is still current today.[27] Even though pilgrims may not completely believe in these promised benefits, there is no doubt that they continue to give.

Given this environment, Hardwar's residents provide visitors multiple opportunities to generate religious merit. The religious economy in Hardwar—as in other pilgrimage places—is the social equivalent of an ecological niche. Just as any particular ecosystem (desert, salt marsh, alpine meadow) supports certain specialized plants and animals, in the same way, pilgrimage environments such as Hardwar foster certain characteristic social patterns. The gift-giving ethos generates patronage, and at the lowest level, this attracts large numbers of beggars; indeed, some beggars have actually migrated to Hardwar because it presents better prospects (Figure 4.2).[28] Some of the beggars seem able-bodied, but for others, particularly the lepers, begging may be their most viable means of support.

Like any other working group, Hardwar's beggars seek to maximize their potential return. Most of them congregate at a few prime locations: at Har-ki-Pairi, where pilgrims come to bathe; at the adjoining *asthipravah ghat*, where pilgrims cast the ashes of their cremated relatives into the Ganges, and at Kushavarta *ghat*, where people perform *pindadan*, a commemorative death rite. Gift giving can be done as part of each of these rituals, and this heightens their prospects for receiving donations. Other popular haunts are the stairways to the bathing *ghat*s, the street intersections near Har-ki-Pairi, and the walkway up to the Mansa Devi temple, where the continual traffic ensures some favorable response. The dividing lines between these environments are as well defined as the transition zones in any ecosystem: there are very few beggars on Subhash Ghat, immediately south of the *asthipravah ghat*, yet one encounters them as soon as one crosses a small incline onto the latter. Subhash Ghat is a commercial area, largely filled with shops and stands, whereas the latter is fertile ritual ground. In the same way, comparatively few people beg in the market, which is a commercial and business area populated mainly by local people.

This highly attuned awareness to place is complemented by comparable attention to time. Har-ki-Pairi's most important ritual times are early morning and early evening, and at these times, the earning potential is highest. In the busy season, groups of beggars hire tempos (three-wheel motorized taxis) and bicycle rickshaws to take them to Har-ki-Pairi in the evening, just like any other local residents heading to their jobs. They are also as keenly aware of the ritual calendar as any other Hardwar resident, since each ritual occasion brings opportunity. Normally quiet places can erupt with activity on festival days and then lapse into quietude on the next day, and certain inauspicious times, such as an eclipse, bring the certainty of receiving alms.[29]



FIGURE 4.2. Wandering beggar, Baisakhi festival 1998. Although he has some ascetic trappings—the white clothing, the beads around his neck, and the single-stringed instrument known as an *ektal*—these were elements in a costume. He had positioned himself on the main street between Har-ki-Pairi and the railroad station, where the flood of pilgrim traffic meant abundant patronage (for which the *ektal* served as his begging-bowl to receive donations).

Aside from those who merely beg, a different class of people perform small services for alms. This distinguishes them from mere beggars, even though their livelihood depends just as heavily on pilgrim donations. These people run the spectrum from the disabled to the apparently able and from the pathetic to the criminal. During my first year in Hardwar, I saw some of them again and again—such as the armless Bengali man who used his feet to draw pictures of deities in colored markers—and I have seen some virtually every time I have returned, such as a blind musician who sits near Har-ki-Pairi, serenading passersby with songs of Hari and Ganga.[30] Many people roam the *ghat*s offering to apply a forehead mark (*tika*) for some small gratuity: a tiny old woman, who always seemed on the brink of demise; a tall, thin man whose only English was "Please some gift for me. Something is better than nothing"; and a muscular

young woman who, I was told, picked pockets on the side. Others solicit money by becoming icons of gods and goddesses or displaying their emblems: one man blackened his skin and dressed up as the Goddess Kali; others dressed and acted like monkeys, becoming icons of Hanuman; and on every Monday (Shiva's day), one sees men carrying large pythons, wandering through the town, and seeking money in Shiva's name. For all of these people, whatever they do, Hardwar's religious importance is the key to their livelihood.

The Gift of Food

Hardwar's strong gift-giving ethos supports a relatively stable indigent community, and one significant factor here is the availability of free food. The gift of food (*annadan*) is highly meritorious—to give food is to give life—and since chapter 11 of the MPM is solely devoted to praising the gift of food, it seems that this ideal has been constant for at least two hundred years.[31]

Food can be given in many possible ways. The most basic is a one-time gift to one person—a piece of fruit, a cup of tea, or a meal. This is often done on the spur of the moment and, in some cases, by simply sharing the food cooked for one's family.[32] Yet one also finds people giving food with greater forethought: either feeding many people on one occasion or feeding people for a specific period of time. In both cases, the type and duration of the offerings clearly depend on the donor's resources. The cheapest option is to offer morning tea, which is far less expensive than food, and the cumulative effect of many individual donations is seen as generating considerable merit.[33] Wealthier donors can sponsor a *bhandara* ("storehouse"), a public feast at which all comers are fed until the food runs out, or one can sponsor food for a specified length of time. *Bhandara* sponsors usually leave the cooking and serving to others, although the sponsors are still seen as receiving its merits, just as the religious benefits from a Vedic sacrifice devolve not to those who perform the ritual but to those who sponsor it.[34] In other cases, sponsors are more personally involved, such as the morning tea and midday meals sponsored by residents of the nearby Advaita Puri Ashram. In this case, the "ladies" prepared food and tea in the ashram kitchen, and the "gentlemen" dished it with their own hands.[35] As one might expect, those who depend on these gifts have an informal but highly efficient communication network, and the speed with which news of such bounty travels is truly amazing.

Another way that pilgrims can give the gift of food is to donate to one of Hardwar's many *annakshetra*s ("fields of food").[36] These organizations provide the poor with give free food and medicine; there are at least six such organizations

clustered around Har-ki-Pairi, and others are scattered throughout the city.[37] These *annakshetra*s provide the poor with a guaranteed food supply throughout the year, making physical starvation nearly impossible.[38]

Although in theory these places are open to all, in fact, their clientele tends to be drawn from the truly destitute. One immediate reason is that the food is awful; the quality is so wretched that it is barely edible. Another possible deterrent could be concerns for ritual purity, at least for higher status people, since one can never be sure who has prepared the food or how it has been prepared.[39] A final, subtler factor further inhibits people from eating there. Although classical texts and established practice heartily commend gift giving at pilgrimage sites, accepting gifts is a very different matter. The textual sources condemn this outright, with one text proclaiming that death is the preferable alternative.[40] Modern attitudes show this same ambivalence toward accepting gifts, and a look at the relevant intangible transactions shows why this is so.

Until now, I have described gift giving as a simple transaction, in which one person gave a tangible good—usually money—in exchange for an intangible one, religious merit or the removal of demerit. Yet where does this intangible benefit come from? It is not produced by the recipient—who merely provides the occasion for a meritorious action—but rather by the karmic merits of the act itself. Yet in accepting the donor's tangible gift, the receiver is seen as also accepting intangible things—whatever inauspiciousness or ill fortune the donor may have at that time.[41] This notion clearly explains why gift giving is such an important component in pilgrimage behavior: it is another way to get rid of evil influences. This also explains the reluctance associated with accepting gifts: in taking something tangible, one risks accepting something intangible as well.[42]

For this reason, food from *annakshetra*s, *bhandhara*s, and individual donors is tinged with inauspiciousness. Although any recourse is permitted in dire necessity, the general ideal was that pilgrims should depend on their own resources and that visiting Hardwar (or any other pilgrimage site) was a time to provide for others, rather than rely on the kindness of others. To eat food one has not earned is to become a beggar, a vessel (*patra*) into which donors can deposit their karmic refuse. *Annakshetra*s and *bhandhara*s are theoretically open to all, but in reality, the only people who eat there are those without resources of their own.

The Search for Patronage

Hardwar's charitable ethos provides a stable if limited livelihood to people at the bottom of the economic pyramid, but the lion's share of the donations go to

charitable and religious institutions, who also occupy a hierarchy of scale—a few are "major league," but most fall somewhat further back in the pack. As with all of Hardwar's institutions, these organizations can contain both light and darkness, piety and opportunism, sincerity and the grossest dishonesty. Some people may shrink at describing them as businesses, but they are clearly an important part of the local economy, and these economic arrangements have clear financial implications for the local people who seek patronage from the visitors.

*Annakshetra*s are at the lowest institutional level, at least in their ability to attract large donations. Each one has a highly visible collection box, usually topped by a sign that both advertises the organization's good works and recounts the religious benefits of gift giving. It is also understandable why donors might prefer to give to an organization, since then they can be more certain that the money will actually be spent on food. The *annakshetra*s tend to be located in highly traveled places and are surely successful in attracting donations, particularly since their good works are on display twice a day, when the hungry line up to get their meals.

Many *annakshetra*s seek to increase their donations by combining religious merit with private enterprise—they solicit donations by dispatching collectors armed with duplicate receipt books and promotional leaflets. These men not only are extremely persistent but also deploy potent psychological measures. They invariably stress that pious giving is a religious duty and follow this by eloquently describing the religious merits that this brings. Such persistence and eloquence are not coincidental; the collectors generally work on commission, which gives them good reason to be as persuasive as possible. Most people are aware of this, and the collectors themselves sometimes admit it. Once, when I steadfastly refused to donate, the exasperated collector declared that I was throwing away the chance to do good for multiple people—for myself, for the poor I would have fed, and for himself, who would have earned by my donation! The collectors' exhortations on religious duty are thus clearly rooted in self-interest, even when the collectors themselves are genuinely working for an *annakshetra*.

As with any other cash-based system, there are multiple opportunities for fraud. The *annakshetra*s undoubtedly feed people every day, but one wonders what percentage of the donated funds are actually used for the poor, and what percentage is "eaten" by middlemen along the way. These organizations are highly visible, they must net substantial donations now and then, and not all of their proprietors are men of good character, since one was alleged to have murdered two women. I did not hear that any of these proprietors were becoming rich, but this could well be happening in a less flagrant way.

The mumblings of dishonest behavior are much clearer with regard to the collectors. Working on commission means that they begin with a vested interest, but it is often alleged that collectors routinely write down a smaller amount than they have actually received, thus ensuring a higher commission. The most profitable strategy is to print up receipt books in the name of a real institution, issue full receipts, and pocket the entire amount. Although this is reprehensible, it seems lamentably common. Several *annakshetra*s have large notices that they have no roving collectors, and yet I have seen people "collecting" in their names.[43]

Although roaming beggars and *annakshetra*s provide visitors with opportunities for merit, the lion's share of the donations are given to religious institutions—ashrams, *dharamshala*s, temples, trusts, and foundations.[44] Religious institutions have long been an important part of Hardwar's economy, and thus the search for patronage is nothing new, but patronage patterns have clearly shifted in the past 150 years. Before that time, royal houses were the most coveted patrons because they had the resources to single-handedly endow temples or construct buildings.[45] By the end of the nineteenth century, their financial position had substantially eroded, and although their patronage still brought considerable status, the most coveted clients were industrialists and business families, whose vast resources made competition for their patronage understandably intense.[46] The most important recent development has been how this patronage base has been widened by tapping large numbers of less wealthy but still affluent donors. In this way, institutions can make up with quantity what any single donation lacks in potency, they can conduct fund drives for specific projects, and they can publicly recognize even modest amounts. I have seen marble plaques recording gifts of 101 rupees, an amount well within many people's means, although the amounts requested are often considerably larger.[47]

Hardwar's distinctive religious environment makes running a religious institution a viable way to make a living, and people have been quick to take advantage of new opportunities. An obvious historical example comes from the 1820s, with the spate of temple building after Har-ki-Pairi was enlarged and rebuilt. A more recent case is the temple of Gupteshvar ("The Hidden Lord"), a buried Shiva *linga* whose location was revealed to a local brahmin in a dream. Gupteshvar is located on the stairway going up to Mansa Devi temple, which in the days before the cable car, was the primary route to the temple. Is it mere coincidence that this image "revealed" itself beside such a heavily traveled path, and not in some desolate place?[48]

Such cases illustrate the real estate maxim that location is everything and that a good location can compensate for almost any deficiency. As only one

example, I would cite the Harihara ashram, which is located on the Kankhal road between Hardwar and the Daksha Mahadev temple. One of the ashram's attractions is a large *rudraksha* tree, which is quite rare for this region, and the tree's large size indicates that it has been there for a long time. Yet the ashram's primary image, a "mercury" Shiva *linga*, was consecrated only in 1986.[49] Despite its recent provenance, the temple attracts significant traffic solely by virtue of its location. Many visitors go to the Daksha temple during their stay and stop at this ashram on the way, drawn by the signs touting its unusual attractions.[50]

On the other hand, one discovers that far more venerable sites have either declined or completely disappeared. The Maya Devi temple is in the heart of town, but it is off the beaten track, and this makes it hard for the temple to draw significant patronage. Although there was some modest construction in 1990, the temple was last renovated in 1943, and it looks rather shabby.[51] Chapters 2 and 3 mentioned the disappearance of Suryakund and Ramakund, bathing "pools" that were important in the early 1800s, and speculated that Bhim Ghoda's proximity to the main road may have saved it from a similar fate. The intervening years have seen the decline of several other temples—the Kangra temples built by Ranjit Singh; the Narayani Shila temple, which is one of the oldest in Hardwar; and the temples at Vishnu *ghat*. In 1990, all of these were being used as residences, although during the Kumbha Mela in 1998, the latter two were again functioning as temples.[52] Although a few of Hardwar's sites—Brahmakund, the Daksha temple, and Bilvakeshvar—seem to have been able to maintain their importance regardless of other trends, for all the others, the search for patronage is a constant struggle. Those that cannot compete will fall into oblivion, as small trees grow stunted in the shade of their larger companions.

Incentives and Motives

Even if one accepts that Hardwar's peculiar circumstances make running a religious institution a viable livelihood, one must examine why people choose to give to one place rather than another. Donors are, of course, free to give to whomever they choose, and as rational agents, they weigh the merits of competing appeals. In an economy in which different institutions are vying for patronage, all of these bodies deploy various incentives to attract and retain donors. Although it is certainly true that donors have their own motives, as is discussed in Chapter 7, it is equally true that certain institutions offer more in exchange than others.

First as both an incentive and a motive is the idea that charitable giving generates religious merit, which will rebound to the donor's eventual advantage.[53] These are the aforementioned intangible transactions, complete with their problems of verifiability. Yet even within this intangible realm, institutions have various ways to strengthen their claims and thus increase their potential appeal. One way is to emphasize a place's peculiar fertility as a "field of merit" to reassure donors that their gifts will indeed be fruitful, and places with more persuasive claims are probably more appealing to donors. Several of Hardwar's temples claim to be *siddhapith*s, places where one's desires are fulfilled: Bilvakeshvar, the Mahakali temple, and two different Hanuman temples. Bilvakeshvar also features a "self-manifested" (*svayambhu*) Shiva *linga*; these mark places where Shiva spontaneously revealed himself, and in such places, he is felt to be especially accessible. The Maya Devi temple claims to be a *shaktipitha*, a place where a part of the dismembered Sati fell to earth; these places are also seen as particularly powerful.[54] The Daksha and Mansa Devi temples both claim to be places where one's desires are fulfilled (*manokamnae purn ho jana*); the latter's literature emphasizes Mansa Devi's relationships with the other wish-granting Shiwalik goddesses, particularly Vaishno Devi. The Harihara ashram, whose attractions are a "mercury" *linga* and a *rudraksha* tree, has several large signs detailing the benefits coming from each of these.

Aside from promising infinite religious merit, institutions can also offer other types of incentives. One is the assurance—explicit or implicit—that such gifts will enhance the donor's status as a religious person. Records of gifts and bequests are usually displayed on marble plaques, thus making one's piety a matter of public record.[55] There are often more tangible incentives, particularly for donations to fund construction. Aside from promising religious merit and status, the latter recorded for posterity by the inevitable marble plaque, donors may receive a more tangible reward—that they and their descendants can stay there whenever they come to Hardwar. In effect, the room (or building) remains theirs in perpetuity, to use when they want, although for most of the time the donors allow the recipients to use it. This promise may or may not be completely fulfilled, particularly in the peak season, but for many people the chance to have a stable place at Hardwar is a powerful incentive. This is particularly true for Delhi dwellers. Hardwar is close enough to Delhi to make it a viable weekend destination, its natural beauty and relaxed pace make it a refreshing change from the capital, and this sort of arrangement means that the institution takes care of overseeing the property.

One practical reason that institutions can successfully solicit such large donations is the pervasive presence of "black" money—that is, unreported income—in modern Indian life.[56] This money cannot be deposited in banks or

invested in legitimate businesses, so aside from buying expensive things, the primary channels for disbursing it are lavish weddings and religious endowments. In an environment such as Hardwar that provides so many opportunities for donation, some people will always accept a donation without needless inquiry into how the money was obtained.

In addition to the material advantage of a permanent room or the status from a plaque extolling their generosity, donors also receive additional psychological benefits. They have been assured that these good works will bring them religious merit, and since a great deal of black money comes through illegal channels—bribes, corruption, and kickbacks—dedicating some of it for religious endowments can be a way to salve one's conscience about its origins, as well as disburse it in a culturally approved manner.[57]

This is not to claim that all religious endowments come from black money or that the people running religious institutions are merely rapacious money-grubbers. Many donors are upright people who give because they have the money and the religious inclination, and many recipients are extremely particular about what sort of gifts they will accept and from whom. Yet regardless of whether they do it themselves, everyone is aware that such tainted gifts are both given and received, and in this atmosphere, the actions of a few cast a shadow upon everyone. Just as Hardwar's citizens run the spectrum from saintly to criminal, so, too, do people running religious institutions. This is the dark side of religious business, which one cannot deny and should not ignore, yet at the same time, it does not have the power to blot out the light.

The Advaita Puri Ashram

Even though everyone acknowledges the shady side of religious business, Hardwar's religious institutions are pivotal to preserving Hardwar's identity as a holy place. On one hand, these institutions create a religiously charged atmosphere by spreading their religious message, by their rules of discipline, and by sponsoring organized religious activities (worship, chanting, and religious discourses).[58] At the same time, these institutions also sponsor public services—particularly food and medical care—that give people the opportunity to serve others. As Lise McKean has noted, some of these institutions have very high public profiles and are very successful in promoting and maintaining these, and this can shade into "holy business."[59] Yet many other institutions do their work in virtual anonymity, and one of these is the Advaita Puri Ashram, a small religious trust near my home in Hardwar, whose workings I have followed since 1989. The ashram was founded by Swami Advaita Puri, a Dashanami

sanyasi whom Partition brought to Hardwar from Jalalpur in Pakistan Punjab. Advaita Puri's disciples built the ashram for him late in the 1940s, but he insisted that it be incorporated as a religious trust governed by a board of directors, even though he was its de facto head during his lifetime.[60]

Advaita Puri took s*amadhi* in 1970, but he still remains a living presence. The room in which he lived has become the ashram's temple, with his habitual sitting place marked by a square of carpet and a glass case containing his portrait. The ashram's manager, whom I called Pundit Ji, invariably speaks of the swami with the present tense. He also uses this tense to describe his service to the swami, and since Pundit Ji was only four years old when the Swami passed away, he can only be talking about the picture. As one often finds with gurus, Pundit Ji described Advaita Puri as a saint with great powers, but the swami's plans for the ashram also clearly addressed practical concerns. He was emphatic that no swami should ever succeed him, to forestall the possibility that a man of bad character could damage the ashram's reputation or misuse its resources. He also decreed that the ashram's temple should have no sculptural images, but only pictures, since images have much greater ritual demands.[61] Such ritual demands would place a greater burden on the ashram's *pujari*, who would be there alone for much of the year, with the possibility that some of these might not be properly fulfilled and provoke divine displeasure. Both of these injunctions were thus ultimately intended to safeguard the ashram from danger.

The ashram's occupancy pattern mirrors that of Hardwar—empty for most of the winter, barring certain holidays, but filled to overflowing during the summer, when it becomes a hotbed of religious activity. Some of this activity was directed toward worship and instruction, but there was also a clear element of service; as mentioned earlier, the women would prepare food for the hungry, which the men would distribute. Pandit Ji spoke very highly of these people and remarked that they always addressed him and each other with respect, even though they were very wealthy. He further noted that everyone staying at the ashram did some work as service (*seva*) to the trust, even though they had servants in their own homes. This was not simply a matter of chores getting done, for then it would not matter who did them, but of doing work in a spirit of service to their teacher and to each other.

The trust seems to be a small, closely held organization in which the residents are also the trust's managers. Many of the residents have known each other for decades and form a small, tight-knit community. In the busy season, arrivals are celebrated with much excitement, and departures with corporate lamentations and farewells. The residents do not own the ashram, which belongs to the trust, but they run it as a quiet place for themselves and their families. One hint of the ashram's closely held quality is that its rooms are not

rented out to the general public but belong to particular families, who lock them up when they depart, to remain empty until they or their guests return. In effect, the ashram functions as a retreat center for a small, well-defined community.

Pandit Ji came to the ashram in 1984 as an eighteen-year-old bachelor and has served there continuously since then. His primary duties are ritual, and his day centers around service to the temple's deities: waking up them up and putting them to sleep, performing morning and evening worship, and offering a midday meal, after which he eats his own.[62] He is an intensely religious man, yet he also has a gentleness that keeps him from becoming overbearing. He is well aware of the social and political currents in the larger world, but the major patterns in his life are religious, and in many ways, his routine possesses a timeless quality. As a brahmin priest, he is highly attentive to purity, particularly in the temple, where he does not allow anyone to eat, drink, or smoke. Aside from his ritual responsibilities, Pundit Ji is also the building manager, and he helps take care of any of the visitors' needs—arranging milk and newspaper deliveries, helping to get a train ticket, or any other task they might have.

Here we see an ashram run by people with genuine spiritual interests, protected by institutional safeguards, and staffed by a conscientious brahmin priest. Pundit Ji and the trust members have a mutually beneficial relationship, in which each party speaks in terms of serving and respecting the other. Pundit Ji has a regular position and a stable place to raise his family, whereas the trust members can be sure that their ashram is being managed by a dependable person and that the daily worship is being assiduously performed. Pandit Ji's position has been strengthened by twenty-five years of faithful service, and the members treat him with appropriate respect, including gifting him and his family on festivals and family occasions.

In its particulars, this ashram is unique—it was founded by a particular swami and is managed by a particular group of people. Hardwar has hundreds of such trusts, since religious bodies own much of the land in the town. Some of these are clearly engaged in "holy business"—that is, operating religious institutions as a means to make money—but others are less tainted by self-interest. They are run not for money (*paise*) but for love (*prem*), and their workings are often virtually invisible, since those behind them have no interest in self-promotion—indeed, it took me months to discover the workings of an institution on my own street. Their collective influence in Hardwar—piety, sincerity, and love—is one of the important forces maintaining Hardwar as a holy place; it is the light that dispels the darkness and, at the same time, casts the shadow.

5

The Hardwar *Panda*s

The previous chapter examined the general contours of Hardwar's larger economy, particularly the economic sector rooted in intangible transactions. Given Hardwar's religious character, it is not surprising that it has an entire economy built on these intangible transactions and that groups seek to benefit from them. One such group is the local government, which receives considerable revenue from renting spaces on the *ghat*s for commercial stands.[1] Another notable group is the "vendors" who exchange intangible benefits for tangible ones, from the poorest beggars to wealthy religious institutions. Both groups are taking advantage of Hardwar's religious economy but have played little part in shaping the city's religious identity.

It is quite different for *panda*s and ascetics, who have both had a long history in Hardwar and who have also retained considerable influence.[2] The Dashanami *sanyasi akhara*s are still Hardwar's single largest landowners, and they not only control most of Hardwar's important religious sites—Maya Devi, Bhairav Akhara, Bilvakeshvar, the Daksha temple, and Mansa Devi—but also own most of Har-ki-Pairi's temples, which are annually leased to the brahmins running them. In contrast, the *panda*s' major influence has been as a lobbying group to preserve Hardwar's traditional religious atmosphere. The Ganga Sabha (the *panda* association) is also largely responsible for everyday cleaning and maintenance at Har-ki-Pairi and Kushavarta Ghats, which are the primary venues for the rituals that *panda*s perform for their clients.[3]

*Panda*s and ascetics have stable and complementary roles as religious contractors. *Panda*s primarily perform life-cycle ceremonies, particularly rites connected with death, whereas ascetics, despite ostensibly renouncing the world, are often actively involved in it as religious authorities, advisers, and brokers. Both groups tend to have longer term, more personalized relationships with clients than the other vendors, and both are sometimes castigated as charlatans using religion to fleece the gullible—after all, from an empirical standpoint, they can be seen as getting something for nothing. Yet those who intentionally misuse their religious authority are far outnumbered by genuinely religious people, whose sincerity helps to maintain the power of these ideals. Like the darkness under the lamp, these opposites exist beside one another, and their proximity sharpens their contrast.

Panda and Pilgrim

As at most Hindu pilgrimage sites, Hardwar has a group of local brahmins who serve as hereditary pilgrim guides. The most respectful name for them is *tirtha purohit* (a *tirtha* "priest"), but the more common name is *panda*, a short form of *pandita* ("a learned man"). *Panda*s arrange for their clients' material and ritual needs, and they also officiate at certain life-cycle ceremonies (*samskara*s). In return, their clients give them fees and gifts. Aside from the growing body of literature on *panda*s in general, in the mid-1970s Hardwar's own *panda* community was the subject of an extended ethnographic study by Anna Jameson (now Anna King).[4]

The relationship between *panda* and pilgrim client (*jajman*) is hereditary and is ultimately determined by the client's ancestral home. Each *panda* lineage in a particular pilgrimage place has the exclusive rights to pilgrims from a certain region or regions, which need not be geographically contiguous.[5] Since the family is the primary model for many Indian social relationships, *panda*s often describe themselves as having a family relationship with their clients. As the pilgrims' "family" in Hardwar, one *panda* explained in 1990, *panda*s were responsible for their clients' ease and well-being. Another *panda* expressed this relationship even more forcefully in 2002, noting that aside from their *panda*, pilgrims had only God to depend on. At the same time, the *panda*s acknowledge their dependence on their clients and freely admit that donations are their primary source of livelihood.

This *panda*-pilgrim connection would have been vital in earlier times, when pilgrimage sites had few lodging places, when the pilgrimage site would have been unfamiliar territory, and when a pilgrimage tour might have lasted

for months. *Panda*s were responsible for lodging, feeding, and caring for their clients, and the *panda*'s home would have been a refuge in which pilgrims could speak their mother tongue, eat their regional cuisine, and exercise their regional customs. Aside from arranging to meet their clients' daily and ritual needs, *panda*s did whatever else was necessary—lending money, nursing the sick, and providing any other help that was needed. In an era when travel facilities were far less developed, they were an essential support network.

This model retains some vitality, although it has been eroded by recent social changes. Some pilgrims still contact their *panda* for lodging, but many more make their own arrangements in hotels or *dharamshala*s, which often have better amenities (e.g., attached baths) than the *panda* guest houses. Since their guest houses tend to attract pilgrims at the lowest end of the market, *panda*s have little incentive to upgrade them. Nevertheless, many pilgrims still use their *panda*s as local resources, especially if they have specific needs—whether advice, money, local influence, or arranging for rites.

The current *panda*-client bond thus seems significantly weaker than the ideal—presuming that it ever existed in this ideal form—and several recent trends have worked to weaken it further. One of these is diminishing faith in the mechanical efficacy of *karmakand*—the ritual actions that are the *panda*s' stock in trade—perhaps stemming from the greater influence of scientific ideas. Another significant factor is pilgrims' changing motives for traveling to Hardwar and their notions of what this trip entails. As chapter 7 addresses at greater length, for many contemporary visitors, a trip to Hardwar seems more like a vacation than a pilgrimage, and such casual visitors may not call on their *panda* unless they have some specific need. Finally, better transportation and the growth of Hindi as a lingua franca have made it easier for people to travel on their own and thus diminished the importance of *panda*s' homes as regional enclaves. Yet even though both *panda*s and pilgrims acknowledge some erosion of this family ideal, it is still upheld as the paradigm for their relationship.

Books and Records

Any contact between pilgrim and *panda* will be recorded in the *panda*'s ledger book (*bahi*), and this record will note the pilgrim's name, place of residence, companions, any ritual actions performed, and the gift (*dan*) to the *panda*. Literate pilgrims usually write their own entries, and *panda*s write the entries for those who cannot.[6] The word *bahi* means "account book," and for the *panda*s, these pilgrim records are their family assets. *Panda*s keep these records for all their clients, grouped first by village, and then by *jati* (endogamous social

sub-group): brahmins in one section, *thakur*s in another, Jats in a third, and so forth. This enables a *panda* to name a pilgrim's family and ancestors with no information other than the pilgrim's name, *jati*, and ancestral village, and many pilgrims expect the *panda* to do this, since doing so proves their hereditary bond.[7]

Not surprisingly, these books are extremely valuable. They can be traded or sold but are reportedly more commonly used as collateral for loans (Jameson 1976: 341). Such reluctance to sell is understandable, since the *bahi*s are a family's inheritance as well as its livelihood, and a lineage with no male heir will usually pass the *bahi*s either to an adopted male relative or through a daughter to an affinal relative.[8] Since possessing these records is de facto entitlement as a *panda*, in disputed cases, one party may take the books "underground," effectively nullifying competing claims (Jameson 1976: 341). Aside from their economic importance, the *bahi*s are admissible as legal evidence, especially in disputes over succession (Goswamy 1966: 182); this same wealth of detail makes them potentially valuable historical documents.[9]

For an outsider, the biggest problem is how to gain access to these books. Given the *bahi*s' economic and legal value, one can readily understand why *panda*s would refuse to make them public. Information in the *bahi*s could also potentially undermine some of the *panda*s' own claims or be used against them or their clients. Van der Veer points out that historical documents provide an independent authority against which people's claims can be evaluated—and are thus either supporting evidence to be disseminated or contrary evidence to be suppressed (1989: 147, 173, 268–69). Given these considerations, it is hardly surprising that *panda*s guard their *bahi*s carefully, and despite glancing over such books several times early in my initial fieldwork in 1989–90, I had more or less given up hope of examining them more carefully.

Assistance eventually came from a most unexpected quarter—the Genealogical Society of Utah, which is associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (LDS). The society had microfilmed 476 rolls of Hardwar *panda* records as part of a worldwide genealogical research project, and the regional director estimated that these comprised 10 percent of Hardwar's total records.[10] The director admitted that progress had been slow and that many *panda*s had been difficult to convince, especially since other "genealogists" had used copied records to set themselves up as *panda*s![11] The society's filming contract seeks to assuage these fears by strictly controlling access to the films and specifies that the society will not "sell, assign, give, or part [with them] in any way … except with the prior, written permission of the Compiler [the *panda*]."[12]

Even scratching the surface of these data permits some observations about the growth of Hardwar pilgrimage and of the *panda*s' history in serving it.

Despite *panda* claims that they had served clients for a thousand years—claims that clearly reinforce their traditional status—I found no entries earlier than the 1770s, and these were extremely scarce. The records became more consistent around 1800, which roughly corresponds to the period of renewed regional stability following the establishment of British control in Upper India. The oldest records came from the immediately adjoining regions of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, and also from Punjab and Rajasthan, which had strong connections with Hardwar because of the northwest trade route. People from Punjab and Rajasthan have a long tradition of performing certain funerary rites in Hardwar, and it is possible that the trade route helped to shape this pattern. Records from eastern India (Bengal and Bihar) do not appear until the 1840s. One factor behind this was almost certainly the sheer distance, which in the time before rail transportation would have inhibited dense pilgrim traffic. People from these regions also had less compelling ritual imperatives, since they customarily performed funerary rites at Gaya in Bihar. Most of the earliest recorded clients are either brahmins or landowners (*zamindar*s)—and these were groups both with the resources to go on pilgrimage and with good reasons for having it recorded. Status-conscious brahmins would have wanted their religious rituals properly attested, whereas *panda*s themselves would have recorded the visits of landowners and royalty to cement future patronage claims. Bayly (1981: 166–67) and van der Veer both discuss how pilgrimage, which was originally confined to elite groups, "was later imitated by socially mobile groups to emphasize their status aspirations," and this certainly seems to have been true in Hardwar, too (van der Veer 1989: 213–14).

In sum, the evidence in these records indicates that Hardwar's *panda-jajman* relationships began in the late 1700s—probably with the growth of the northwest trade route—and that these relationships flourished as this route grew better established and the surrounding country more stable. Hardwar has a long history as a pilgrimage place, as chapter 2 clearly shows, but the *panda*s' involvement there seems briefer than one might expect. Evidence for this can be seen not only in *sanyasi* control over Hardwar's ritual sites but also in the *panda* settlement patterns themselves. *Panda*s report that they dwell in Kankhal and Jwalapur to safeguard Hardwar's purity, since "family life" (marital sexuality) is forbidden at pilgrimage places. Yet if the *panda*s were later settlers in an area already controlled by ascetics, it would have been prudent to settle their families at some distance from Hardwar. Clearer evidence of immigration comes from *panda* lineage names, which are based on their place of origin. Some lineages are from villages quite close to Hardwar—which would make them the "local" brahmins—but the largest group comes from Phirahedi, a village about forty miles away (Jameson 1976: 101–102).[13] This was a significant

distance in premodern times, and the *panda*s must have had compelling reasons to migrate to Hardwar. One can easily envision the scenario that Mulchand suggested more than a century ago—that as the Hardwar trade developed in the late 1700s, nearby brahmins saw this opportunity and moved there to take advantage of it (1904: 36–38).[14]

These conclusions on the *panda*s' tenure are clearly provisional—they are based on a brief look at these records, which are themselves only a small percentage of the whole—but these conclusions are supported by two other considerations. One is Bayly's evidence for the Benares pilgrim trade, for which the oldest extant record is a copperplate inscription from 1658, and the earliest extant ledger book from 1665.[15] It would be very surprising to find older records in Hardwar, since Benares was an economic hub as well as a sacred site. The other supporting consideration is other scholars' judgments on the antiquity of the Hardwar *bahi*s, some of which are only marginally different than mine.[16] Based on all of these factors, it seems that the *pandas*' tenure as Hardwar's pilgrim guides is far shorter than people generally assume.

Working Conditions

Although most rituals are performed either at Kushavarta Ghat or Har-ki-Pairi, the *panda*s' "offices" are either in small rooms near Kushavarta or off the main street in the older part of town. The eldest members often spend most of their time at the office and delegate tasks such as meeting trains, seeking clients, and performing rituals either to the lineage's junior members or to hired agents.[17] This not only reinforces their senior status and keeps them free to meet with clients but also insulates them from the impurity of certain rites, as is discussed later.

As noted before, recent changes have eroded the idealized *panda*-pilgrim relationship, in which the *panda* provided for the client's ritual and material needs. Luxury hotels have rendered the *panda*s' lodgings less desirable; more frequent, casual travel to Hardwar makes people less likely to perform rituals on every visit, and a more scientific worldview has raised greater doubts about the efficacy of ritual action (*karmakand*). Many *panda*s have responded slowly as these changes have eroded their status and livelihood, and this is hardly surprising. As religious specialists, the *panda*s are an extremely conservative community, and such communities tend to change more slowly than the surrounding society—even when their livelihood has been affected by forces beyond their control and business as usual will no longer suffice. The big difference between *panda*s and many other displaced workers is that their work is

not only their livelihood but also their religious duty. A laid-off auto worker can seek another career without worrying how the auto company will manage, but *panda*s have hereditary religious obligations to their clients, regardless of whether this work can support them.[18] *Panda*s have responded to this dilemma in various ways—by hiring "contract" *panda*s to serve their clients or by having some family members work "day" jobs and do *panda* work on weekends and holidays. Although most *panda*s take their hereditary obligations seriously, they also clearly see how social changes have diminished their prospects, and among young people, only the least ambitious or most staunchly traditional seek to pursue this as their sole source of livelihood.

Despite their diminished prospects, *panda*s still play an important role in Hardwar's religious environment. Even casual visitors usually perform certain basic rituals, particularly a Ganges bath and distributing alms. Many pilgrims also perform further ceremonies over which the *panda*s preside, and in June 2005, a painted notice board on *panda* Hari Om Sharma's stall at Har-ki-Pairi listed the rites he could arrange: Ganga Puja (worship of the Ganges) for general peace and prosperity, s*uhag pithari* for a married couple's well-being, and the Gift of a Cow (*godan)*—presumably to a brahmin—now usually symbolic, since a good cow is very expensive. The sign also listed several rituals connected with the life cycle, such as a child's first haircut (*mundan*), a boy's sacred thread ceremony (*janeu*), and memorial ceremonies for the dead (*pindadan*; see Figure 5.1). In addition to facilitating rituals, the *panda*s also still serve as resources for pilgrims—whether safeguarding valuables while they are bathing in the Ganges, lending them money, helping them get a train ticket, or arranging for ritual necessities.[19] Yet with the loosening of traditional bonds, one sees a greater tendency to view *panda*s as hired contractors in an economy based on demand and exchange, rather than as members of one's extended family.

The most enduring contact between *panda* and client comes in performing the life-cycle ceremonies (*samskara*s), and here that sense of family relationship remains important. One young *panda* informed me that clients were "required" to come for ceremonies relating to birth, marriage, and death, and given the social importance of these life transitions, one would expect to find them marked by rites. Birth is marked by the young child's ceremonial head shaving (*mundan*). Many families have a tradition of performing this ceremony in Hardwar, and I have seen elaborate processions bearing the child to Har-ki-Pairi, sometimes even with a hired band. For marriage, Jameson describes a ceremony called *suhag pithari* ("the basket [granting] an auspicious married state"); the wife performs this ceremony the first time a couple visits Hardwar to ensure her husband's long life.[20] The most important ceremony comes after death, and this rite has changed less than any of the others. Death rituals tend



FIGURE 5.1. *Pindadan* (a commemorative death ritual) at Gangotri in 1990. The pilgrim family (left) is performing this ritual—a common rite at pilgrimage places—facilitated by their *panda* or pilgrim guide (right, in dark coat).

to change slowly in any society, since they provide the mechanisms through which the living can work through their grief. In general, pilgrims do not come to Hardwar to die—unlike at Benares—and thus a deceased person's cremation and eleven-day funeral rites are usually performed in the place where the death occurred.[21] Hardwar's most common death ceremony is *asthivisarjana*, in which ashes and bones from the cremation pyre are ceremonially immersed in the Ganges.

Immersing ashes at Hardwar probably helps to provide a person with a sense of closure, since it was traditionally the final funeral rite; in earlier times, it might have been performed many years after the actual death, although as transportation has improved, many people now do this immediately afterward.[22] This ritual carries intense religious symbolism—the promise of final liberation found in the story of the Descent of the Ganges. Just as in the myth Bhagiratha labored to bring the Ganges down from heaven so that her touch might release his ancestors, these people consign the ashes of their dead to the holy river, and have been doing so since at least the seventh century.[23] People from Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, and especially Rajasthan have a history of bringing their dead to Hardwar, and on the whole, this pattern has remained very strong.

The *pandas*' monopoly over this psychologically and religiously important rite has clear economic implications. Jameson (1976: 350) reports that *asthivisarjana* provides the *pandas*' single greatest source of income, and there is little reason to believe that this has changed since she did her research. These rituals have no fixed prices, and this inevitably creates conflict between *panda* and client. Although every rite includes a token fee (*dakshina*) to ensure the rite's success, clients are also expected to give the *panda* a gift (*dan*). The *panda*'s determination of an "appropriate" gift—based on the client's wealth and social position—may differ sharply from his client's. Fixing this amount usually involves considerable haggling, which may even take place after the ritual has begun to apply greater pressure on the client. Yet in the end, neither party operates from a position of absolute strength; the *panda* cannot compel the client to pay, nor can the client force the *panda* to accept, and the final agreement usually involves mutual compromise. Since pilgrims' ready cash is often limited, they usually make a token gift on the spot and pledge the balance to be collected later. *Pandas* periodically visit clients to collect these pledges and may also perform a *puja* at the client's home, as another way to strengthen relationships with their clients.[24]

Perceptions and Attitudes

Many people have ambivalent feelings toward *pandas*, despite their brahmin status, local position, and hereditary connection with pilgrims. One clear reason for this is that *pandas*' fees are always negotiated, which temporarily makes them adversaries to their clients. *Pandas* have clear incentives to seek the largest possible gift, whereas clients have clear incentives to offer less. Even though the final amount is always reached by consensus—as one *panda* described it, the amount that one could give "with happy heart"—the time before that moment is marked by these competing interests. Given *pandas*' understandable desire to maximize their earnings, one can easily understand the stereotype of them as greedy and rapacious.[25]

These economic assessments also influence how *pandas* receive their clients, and this may be another reason behind people's ambivalence toward them. Everyone knows that wealthy clients receive greater attention and care, since cultivating relationships with these clients (including industrialists or nonresident Indians) is likely to bring greater returns. Jameson (1976: 329–30) reports that financial considerations can influence *pandas* to accept low-caste people as clients, although swearing them to secrecy. Sadly, this pragmatic orientation also means that people without money or status are sometimes treated very shabbily:

> Many years ago I came to Hardwar, and saw an old woman who had come to the Ganges to do the last rites for her son. The *panda* was asking for *daksina*, and she was offering one, two, three, four rupees. The *panda* demanded twenty rupees, and when she said that she didn't have that much money, he replied that in that case the rites would not be successful, and her son would not find peace. At this point she began to cry, asking him how she would be able to get this money. I came and asked what was the matter. The woman told me her story, asking the *panda* why he was doing this to her, while the *panda* told me to mind my own business and go away. At this point I lost my temper, and gave him such a kick that he fell into the Ganges. I called him a bloodsucker, and told him to come out and perform the rites (*puja karana*) for the woman. In the end I gave him the twenty rupees, and a couple of hard slaps in the bargain.[26]

A more subtle yet equally important factor is that most of the *panda*s' income comes from donations. *Panda*s claim the hereditary right to accept these, but as noted in the previous chapter, taking donations can affect a group's status, even for brahmins.[27] Since the most meritorious brahmin recipient is one who does not normally accept gifts, the more one accepts such gifts, the more one diminishes one's status as a worthy recipient. A more serious problem is that gift giving can also be a means to transfer inauspiciousness, which is passed to the receiver along with the gift (Raheja 1988: 70). Certain gifts—such as those given immediately after death—are so violently inauspicious that only the most debased brahmin communities will accept them. Both of these considerations cast their shadow over the *panda* community, since gifts constitute the bulk of their income.

The *panda*s are certainly aware that gifts are potentially contaminating. They do not officiate at rites during the first twelve days after death, when the death impurity is the strongest. These are performed by a debased brahmin group known as Mahabrahmans, who also accept gifts for these rites. Yet the *panda*s receive significant income from *asthivisarjana*, in which the remains of a cremation pyre are immersed in the Ganges. The *panda*s justify this by distinguishing between *kacca* ("partial") and *pakka* ("complete") death: the former involves a corpse and the highly contagious impurity that goes with it, whereas the latter refers to ashes that have been purified by fire. Jameson also stresses that the *panda*s never handle the cremated remains during *asthivisarjana*; this, too, is done by the Mahabrahmans (Jameson 1976: 350–51). These insulating strategies—accepting gifts only for *pakka* death and delegating the actual rituals

to Mahabrahmins—allow *panda*s to claim to be unaffected by the impurity and inauspiciousness of the dead.

These strategies rationalize the probity for a lucrative practice, but both of them have problems. One is the sharp distinction between pure and impure gifts, with the former going to the *panda*s, the latter to the Mahabrahmans. Yet no gift is ever pure; it is only less damaging than others. Some gifts are more patently undesirable, but accepting any gift brings perils, since recipients describe themselves as accepting them based on their ability to "digest" them, that is, to process and assimilate these consequences (Raheja 1988: 201–2).[28] The second strategy delegates the impurity of the dead to the Mahabrahmans, who actually handle the ashes of the dead, but the inauspiciousness of death is less easily contained. Regardless of whether *panda*s actually handle the ashes, these rituals provide the bulk of their income, and that income retains the scent of the corpse. One telling metaphor describing this was that they were "eating the dead"—that is, earning their living by performing rites for the dead.[29] Just as eating spoiled food can be dangerous to one's health, in the same way, generations of earning their living in this manner is believed to have affected the *panda*s. Their ritual control over this rite has helped them carve out a largely inviolable niche, yet at the same time, it has tainted them through contact with death—not only because their clients routinely bring the remains of the dead into their lodgings but also in the very money they receive for their services.[30]

This connection between corpse and earnings was abundantly evident in the ceremony I watched most closely. The client came bearing a bag of "flowers"—the euphemism for the remains—as well as a metal tray with various ritual items: a coconut, flower petals, flour-dough ball, sesame seed, cone of burning incense, and some disk-shaped sugar candy. The officiant commenced the ritual by ripping open the bag and laying it on the *ghat*, and only then started to negotiate his fee. After five minutes of animated bargaining, the officiant placed the fee—in this case, ninety-one rupees—directly on top of the flowers and liberally splashed both with Ganges water. The money was put to one side, and various things piled into the client's cupped hands: first some flowers, then the flour-dough ball (which had been pressed into the sesame seed), then the coconut, and finally the sugar candy. The client held these for some time, while the officiant arranged the bank notes and dipped them in the Ganges; he also deliberately searched the cloth bag for the coins that had been put in there with the remains, which he also washed in the Ganges. When he had finished with the money, he lifted the coconut from the client's hands, and the client placed the contents of his hands in the Ganges, together with the rest of the flowers.[31] Two elements here clearly connect the *panda*s' livelihood and death: the coins were scavenged from the bag by picking through the ashes,

and the officiant's fee was placed directly on the ashes. Of course, both coins and notes were washed in the Ganges, which purifies all things, and Jameson reports that the rite is performed by a Mahabrahman, who receives a quarter of the fee (1976: 350–51). Nevertheless, the money retains the scent of death.

This sense that *panda*s have been corrupted undoubtedly lies behind the widespread allegations of their private debauchery—eating meat, drinking liquor, and sexual license—which is felt to mirror their corrupt interiors. Jameson discusses allegations regarding nonvegetarian food, liquor, and sexual impropriety but insists that their truth or falsity remain uncertain (1976: 164–67, 256–60). She also notes the difficulty in getting any accurate information about this, since everyone realized that revealing such things would seriously damage the community's reputation. The imperative to maintain an orthodox facade also surely influenced *panda* responses to her written questionnaire, which revealed that they strongly upheld traditional norms such as vegetarianism, prohibition of alcohol, and endogamy (1976: 72). Given their clear vested interest in upholding their reputation, any other answers seem highly unlikely.

I personally doubt that *panda* wickedness is anything near as pervasive as popular opinion would claim. As noted earlier, the *panda*s are an extremely conservative community. This makes it quite likely that they would uphold religiously conservative norms, particularly a vegetarian diet, and many of them seem quite sincere about religious life. Still, any population has deviant behavior, and it seems likely that such widespread allegations—particularly those made by local people—would have some basis in fact. Despite her noncommittal judgment on these other allegations, Jameson admits that many *panda*s spend their afternoons high on *bhang* (made from cannabis), which she describes them as taking in moderation and with a religious purpose. Eating *bhang* admittedly carries less of a stigma than drinking liquor, since it is seen as part of traditional culture, and it is routinely consumed during the celebrations for festivals such as Holi.[32] Despite this, most respectable people condemn regular drug use, and this habit is seen as evidence of moral corruption.[33]

Further evidence of *panda* degeneration is the allegation that they have abandoned their obligation to learning. Amarnath often affirmed that all brahmins had four duties: to teach and to study, and to give and accept gifts. He noted that the *panda*s fulfilled only two of these—teaching and accepting gifts—and neglected the other two.[34] The *panda* community undoubtedly still contains genuinely learned men, but many *panda*s are ritual specialists whose skills are based on memorization. As belief in the efficacy of ritual has declined, their position has correspondingly eroded.[35]

The *panda*s themselves are highly conscious of their declining prospects and seeking to adapt to their changing environment. Wealthier families have

responded to Hardwar's increasing tourism by opening tourist businesses, in which they continue to serve their clients' needs, but in an economy based on money rather than on hereditary relationships.[36] Others have tried to remain competitive in the hotel market by upgrading existing facilities or by building new ones—perhaps in the hope that their hereditary connections would confer some advantages. Another well-established trend is for men to seek "outside" jobs, ideally white-collar jobs, that conform to traditional ideas of suitable brahmin work: they involve authority, writing, and record-keeping and do not require manual labor. Others have opened businesses of their own or work in family-owned businesses. These men moonlight as *panda*s on weekends and holidays—since serving their clients is a religious obligation—but most *panda*s have realized that ritual work is less lucrative than in the past, and they may even delegate their ritual duties to hired agents. The future is much dimmer for families without such resources—or for men with less ambition or education, who face continually declining prospects.

An important factor affecting the *panda*s is that they do not own land at Har-ki-Pairi, even though this is their primary working site. The spaces for their *takht*s (platforms) are rented from the city, and almost all of the temples are owned by the *sanyasi mahant*s, who lease them to the brahmins who actually run them. This sense of marginalization may help explain the continuing *panda* opposition to the renovation of the Ganga *mandir*, which is probably Har-ki-Pairi's oldest temple, and one of only two privately owned temples on the *ghat*. According to local tradition, the temple was built by Raja Man Singh in the late 1500s, and before its most recent renovation, the building's roofline had a domed shape, perhaps influenced by Mughul architecture.[37] Newspaper accounts describe the *panda*s as having blocked previous attempts to renovate the temple, which is actually in the middle of the pool at Har-ki-Pairi, but the water's constant flow eventually rendered the building structurally unsound, and renovation was required. The temple owners—who originally hail from Maharashtra—drew up plans to rebuild the temple and to replace the domed roof with a tall spire more characteristic of north Indian temples. Renovation work began in late 1997, so that it would be completed before the next year's Kumbha Mela, but in February 1998—six weeks before the Kumbha Mela's climactic day—the construction was halted by a protest by the Ganga Sabha (*Amar Ujala* 3/23/98: 9). Since then, the temple renovation has halted, and the two sides have taken the matter to court, where it is still unresolved.

Although the Ganga Sabha's stated complaint was that the new construction altered the historical architecture at Har-ki-Pairi, one cannot help suspecting other motives. Among these are rage and envy that outsiders from

Maharashtra controlled Hardwar's oldest temple—and the wealth it produced—and that the reconstructed temple would be Har-ki-Pairi's tallest. There are also strong hints that this protest was preceded by a demand to share the temple's revenues. In one newspaper article, a temple spokesman characterized claims that the temple offerings had ever been shared as completely false; from this, one can infer that there had been this demand, supported by the claim that it had happened in the past.[38] On the face of it, this incident seems like an attempt by the *panda*s to gain greater control of Har-ki-Pairi and greater access to its patronage. It also highlights the extent to which they have been marginalized in their ancestral home.

The *panda*s are a tight-knit community, and this tends to make them suspicious of outsiders. My experiences were infelicitous during my first year of fieldwork (1989–90), but these have changed sharply over time. As I have gotten to know members of the community, I have usually found them to be both gentle and friendly; as in many cases, a proper introduction makes all the difference in the world. I also feel considerable sympathy for them and their circumstances, since their traditional livelihood has been eroded by forces beyond their control. They are doing their best to adapt to these forces but are constrained by both their conservative values and their hereditary obligations. In many cases, they seem to be quite sincere about upholding both of these, although they admittedly have a vested interest here.[39]

Pilgrim remarks often echo these ideas and underscore that there is still real substance to this relationship. Even pilgrims who condemned *panda*s in general—for their greed, lack of learning, and alleged debauchery—would often speak of their own *panda* with evident respect. To some extent, this is a self-selecting sample—people who had cut off all contact with *panda*s would not have one to praise—but it is still a striking phenomenon. People know that their *panda* will seek gifts from them, but pilgrims' continued loyalty and patronage show that they must be gaining something from this relationship.

In light of this continuing relationship, even by more educated people, the *panda*s' control over *asthivisarjana* looms all the more important. Aside from the ceremony's religious symbolism, which evokes Hardwar's mythic identity, as the final death rite, it helps the bereaved work toward some feeling of closure and provides the transition from one generation to the next. Although this attitude is also changing, it is happening very slowly, and as long as this ritual remains important, the *panda*s will retain some of their traditional position. Yet at the same time, the ritual importance of *asthivisarjana* negatively affects Hardwar's development possibilities as a tourist site. Demand for this ritual ensures a never-ending stream of pilgrim clients, yet this same pilgrim torrent—since many of them are unsophisticated villagers—firmly embeds Hardwar in a

downscale market and runs counter to efforts to develop an upscale, purely recreational tourist site.

The Ganga Sabha—History

Chapter 3 has chronicled the sometimes tense relationship between the *panda* community and the British colonial government at the cusp of the twentieth century, a time when these parties' disputes were ultimately rooted in their divergent goals. The British were trying to maintain public health, safety, and order, whereas the *panda*s were attempting to reap the benefits from the burgeoning pilgrim traffic and to defend any threats to their interests. The first such instance arose after the forcible dispersion of the 1892 Mahavaruni Fair, in 1897 came a protest against canceling train reservations during festivals, and the last and most important protest was the opposition to the Bhim Ghoda weir in 1916.

Each of these occasions saw the *panda*s acting as a unified body. The first protest seems to have been engineered by Seth Suraj Mal, although the *panda*s were quite willing to take part. The second threat prompted the formation of the Sanatan Dharma Sabha. This body's professed aims were "to instruct the Brahmins in the tenets of their religion and to improve the members morally and intellectually" (HMI Jan. 1898: 22), but its real purpose was to serve as a lobbying body—at least according to the Magistrate of Saharanpur. The Sanatan Dharma Sabha seems to have been short-lived—it may have collapsed when its president, Pandit Gopi Nath, found it expedient to return to Lahore—but it marks the *panda*s' first corporate attempt to influence British policy.

Twenty years later, the conflict over the Bhim Ghoda weir stimulated the creation of the Ganga Sabha ("Ganges Assembly"). A Sabha pamphlet records that Pandit Malviya founded the Ganga Sabha to represent local interests and to ensure compliance with the final agreement on the Bhim Ghoda weir; the text emphasizes the *panda*s' later support in this struggle but omits their lack of concern when the construction began. Since the Ganga Sabha was formed in response to a perceived threat to Hardwar's purity and integrity, this has strongly influenced its sense of mission. From its inception, the Sabha has dedicated itself to preserving Hardwar's purity and to ensuring an appropriate religious environment.[40]

Why were the *panda*s so concerned with maintaining Hardwar's purity? One clear reason was its connection with their livelihood. As the railroad increased Hardwar's pilgrim traffic—and thus enhanced its economic climate—*panda*s would clearly oppose any developments seen as diminishing Hardwar's sanctity and thus their earning potential. Yet the *panda*s' economic interests do

not preclude genuine religious concern, for which there is considerable evidence.[41] The *panda*s' homes are in Jwalapur and in Kankhal, rather than in Hardwar, since family life (marital sexuality) is forbidden at a pilgrimage site.[42] Their concern for Hardwar's purity has been consistent for 150 years—considerably predating the Ganga Sabha—and they have actively sought to defend this purity. Their efforts begin in the 1860s with a ban on fishing near Kushavarta Ghat, and this was later followed by bans on liquor, prostitution, and nonvegetarian food.[43] So despite clear connections with their economic interests, it seems that these are not the only factor driving the *panda*s' concern.

This concern for purity has occupied the Ganga Sabha since its inception, and its literature details the body's efforts to preserve an appropriate religious atmosphere. Some of the Sabha's accomplishments seem mere formalities, such as changing the name of the main road to Malviya Road and naming the masonry platform across from Har-ki-Pairi Malviya Island, but others seem far more substantial. Shoes and leather objects were prohibited from Har-ki-Pairi and its environs in 1927, doubtless impelled by that year's Kumbha Mela. In 1933, the government began building a sewer line (completed in 1937), which the Sabha claims was prompted by its protests against Ganges pollution. In 1935, the Sabha refused to abide by laws banning religious assemblies at Har-ki-Pairi, and after a struggle, the municipal bylaws were amended to permit these.[44] The Sabha also claims to have pressured the government into declaring Hardwar a "dry" area.[45]

Still, these claims seem open to some doubt. For instance, leather seems to have been forbidden at Har-ki-Pairi long before 1927. One allegation after the 1892 Mahavaruni Fair was that soldiers walked on the *ghat* in their shoes, an allegation that the authorities vehemently denied (HMI Dec. 1892: 37). One might also entertain doubts that the Sabha's protests were instrumental to the sewer line construction. Given the government's fear that Hardwar festivals could serve as a breeding ground for epidemics, it is hard to believe the government would have waited for *panda* protests before building a sewer line—especially since the sewer was finished just before the 1938 Kumbha Mela, which attracted the largest crowds in sixty years.[46] The Sabha was probably instrumental in efforts such as prohibition—which perfectly reflects its members' conservative values—but it seems that in general their literature exaggerates their importance.

The Ganga Sabha—Activity

However much one may doubt the Sabha's achievements, one cannot ignore its concern for Hardwar's purity, which is patently visible every day. On one

hand is the concern for physical cleanliness: the Sabha is responsible for keeping the *ghat*s clean and employs a staff of sweepers, scrubbers, and hose-men. This staff works every day of the year, and Har-ki-Pairi's *ghat*s always have an attractive, well-scrubbed quality. Aside from physical cleanliness, the Sabha also seeks to create a wholesome religious atmosphere. One example is the ban on movie advertisements at Har-ki-Pairi, since their presence might present inappropriate images.[47] Other examples can be seen in the actions that are forbidden on the grounds that they compromise Har-ki-Pairi's purity—taking photos, smoking, wearing shoes, washing clothes, shaving, bathing with soap, and massaging the body with oil. Signs on the *ghat* explicitly forbid these actions, and these prohibitions are also part of the "essential information" (*avashyak nivedan*) in the Ganga Sabha's free almanac.[48] Here one might observe that making rules and enforcing them are two different things. Anyone bringing shoes onto Har-ki-Pairi will probably get a sharp rebuke, but photography is something completely different. Indian pilgrims routinely take pictures at the *ghat*, and a cadre of local men make their living by taking pictures of pilgrims, with the *ghat*s and temples in the background. The utter inability to curb this practice shows that the Sabha's authority stems primarily from public opinion, rather than any legal sanctions.[49]

The Ganga Sabha's efforts to protect Hardwar's purity give it a highly visible presence, which can only be to its members' advantage. The Sabha is also highly visible in Hardwar's public ritual life, partly by sponsoring religious programs but primarily by performing Ganges worship (*puja*) and *arati* ("illumination") at Har-ki-Pairi every morning and evening. The nightly *arati* is Hardwar's most popular public ritual event, with thousands of spectators on a busy night. About an hour before it begins, brahmins bring a palanquin bearing a silver image of the goddess Ganga to the water's edge and prepare the image for worship by adorning it with flowers and silken cloths. The ceremony commences with the sound of every bell, gong, and conch shell at Har-ki-Pairi and is followed by the *arati*, an act of worship in which one illuminates a deity by waving a lamp in front of the image. During the Ganges *arati*, lamps are waved on either side of the silver image, illuminating the Ganga's iconic form, but other lamps are swept over the flowing waters, to pay homage to her material form as well. The lamps are so large that the men hold them with both hands, and the flames can rise several feet high. The lamps blaze against the gathering darkness, and the falling drops of burning ghee (clarified butter) flash like falling stars. Yet aside from this rite's aesthetic beauty, it is also worship. During the ceremony, loudspeakers broadcast a devotional song—known as the Ganga *arati*—which recounts her sacred history, powers, and potential blessings for the faithful, reminding people of the deity flowing before them.[50]

The *arati*'s large crowds are clearly good for the local economy. Har-ki-Pairi's temples are all finely decorated, since many spectators are likely to visit them after the ceremony. The crowds are also good for the nearby businesses, since for an hour after the *arati*, the market teems with people, many of whom do some shopping as they wend their way back to their lodgings.

Aside from its public and ritual presence, the Ganga Sabha performs various sorts of public service—a lost and found, a public address system for locating missing persons, a booth for checking one's shoes, a free dispensary, and an *annakshetra* for feeding the poor. There are also reportedly facilities to help pilgrims who have been robbed or are otherwise in need. Such efforts reinforce the Sabha's image as serving pilgrims' material needs, as well as their ritual needs.[51] All of these efforts require money, and the Sabha has an active staff roaming the *ghat*s to solicit donations.[52] Since these collectors work on commission, they zealously proclaim the Sabha's pious works: the daily expenditures to clean the *ghat*s and to sponsor the daily *arati*, the expenses for ceremonies on festival days, the daily numbers fed at the *annakshetra*, and all of the Sabha's other services. The collectors' most productive time is just before the *arati*, since in the high season spectators have to come an hour early to get a good seat. This captive audience provides a tremendous fund-raising opportunity, and the collectors exploit it fully.

The Ganga Sabha is thus one more organization vying for pilgrim donations, although its location and high profile give it a distinct advantage. Donations seem to be its primary source of revenue, and this seems to have been true throughout its existence. Although the Sabha's history reveals a genuine concern for Hardwar's purity, it also shows that none of their accomplishments involved spending their own money. Har-ki-Pairi's recent improvements—the restoration of the concrete island in 1925, the expansion and marble tiling in 1937, and the second expansion and construction of the enclosed bathing *ghat* in 1986—have all been underwritten either by individuals or by foundations.[53] On an everyday level, individual donors have given the Sabha nearly all of its tangible assets: the guest house, the public address system, the television and VCR on which pilgrims can watch religious programs after the *arati*, the almanac's printing, and the silver image of goddess Ganga.[54]

The almanac's account of the Sabha's achievements ends with a plea for financial support: for solar-powered lights for Har-ki-Pairi, marble flooring for the concrete island, a multistory addition to the guest house, and renovations to the oldest Ganges temple.[55] All of these projects, with the possible exception of the last, seem to have less to do with maintaining Hardwar's purity than with creating a high-class atmosphere that is more likely to generate patronage. Although the Sabha stresses defending Hardwar's purity and serving Hardwar's

pilgrims, both of these goals are clearly connected to the members' economic interests. These activities cannot be attributed only to cynical self-interest, but one must also acknowledge that such interests exist and that they are a compelling reason for action.

Since its inception, one of the Sabha's stated aims has been to protect and promote the interests of its members, the Hardwar *panda*s. It has four highly visible offices: two near Har-ki-Pairi, one at Kushavarta *ghat*, and one at the Suraj Mal *dharamshala*. The announcements posted at these offices, available to every literate pilgrim, clearly show how they are trying to safeguard these interests:

1. An essential element in a successful pilgrimage is to take the trouble to meet with your *tirtha purohit* (hereditary pilgrim guide).
2. In the same way, your ancestors met with their *tirtha purohit*s. Your *purohit* has detailed records of them, and it will give you great pleasure to learn about them.
3. You should contact your *tirtha purohit* to carry out religious rites for both the gods and the ancestors. They are completely familiar with your customs and traditions, and will make arrangements for all religious and divine works.
4. If you do not know your *purohit*'s identity, you can discover it at the places mentioned below (here follows a list of the Sabha's Hardwar offices).
5. Heeding these instructions will undoubtedly save you from all sorts of deception and difficulty. A *tirtha purohit*'s primary duty and obligation is to guide pilgrims on the correct path.

These instructions were posted in 1990 on a billboard at Kushavarta, which is the primary site for *pindadan*, a commemorative death ritual. They clearly evince *panda* efforts to promote ritual action, just as one sees in the MPM. Another of the Sabha's aims is to maintain the status quo among *panda*s and to protect each member's hereditary rights. One sign of this is that the main office has a directory to guide pilgrims to their genuine *panda*. Although individual *panda*s' wealth and position may bring them greater influence, the community's relative unity has helped to maintain traditional *panda-jajman* relationships, unlike at some other pilgrimage places, which have been marked by conflict.[56]

Throughout its existence, the Ganga Sabha has worked strenuously to uphold *panda* concerns and to promote their interests. Not surprisingly, its Achilles' heel has been its own members. Since the Sabha's primary influence stems from public opinion, it has no real power to enforce decrees. One example

of this has been its inability to prevent photographers from working the *ghat*s, even though photography is prohibited at Har-ki-Pairi. More telling examples come from the errant members of the community, against whom the Sabha cannot level effective sanctions.[57] Although the community's internal cohesiveness helps it present a united front against outsiders, family loyalties have sometimes been a major stumbling block to enforcing internal discipline.

As individuals and a corporate body, Hardwar's *panda*s play important roles in the city's religious life. As individuals, *panda*s are teachers, guides, and ritual performers. Their most important role is the rites for the dead, and performance of these rites seems fairly stable, despite changing attitudes toward ritual in general. As a corporate body, *panda*s have continually tried to protect its members' hereditary rights, to guard Hardwar's purity, and to promote an appropriate religious atmosphere. The Ganga Sabha has high visibility by virtue of sponsoring the Ganges *arati*, overseeing cleaning the *ghat*s, and performing various pilgrim services. Both individual *panda*s and the group are trying to adapt to the shift from traditional pilgrimage patterns toward a growing stress on sightseeing and tourism—individual *panda*s by opening tourist-related businesses, and the Ganga Sabha by promoting "first-class" facilities. Yet at heart, both the *panda*s and the Sabha are profoundly traditional and conservative, and seek to uphold these traditional values in a rapidly changing society.

6

Ascetic Life

Chapter 5 examined the roles that *panda*s play in Hardwar's religious life. Their individual importance comes from the rites they perform for their hereditary clients, particularly the death rites, whose psychological importance helps to sustain this connection. On a collective level, the Ganga Sabha seeks to protect and enhance Hardwar's religious atmosphere and thus to protect member interests by retaining some control over Hardwar. In both cases, Hardwar's *panda*s are a closed community: only Hardwar brahmins are entitled to perform these rites, cultivate these sorts of client relationships, or belong to the Ganga Sabha. Such strict boundaries have protected the *panda*s' ritual monopoly but have also locked its members into a tightly defined role. As social changes over the past century have eroded the *panda*s' economic prospects and earning potential, these same changes have also diminished the importance of their traditional status as brahmin priests (*purohits*).

Both of these factors are significantly different for ascetics, Hardwar's other resident *religiosi*. Whereas *panda*s gain their identity by birth, ascetics take on this identity through conscious choice and are thus a more open group. Ascetic groups show far greater variety than the *panda*s and draw members from all social strata and parts of India, although one still finds rank and status distinctions. Ascetics play important roles in Hardwar's religious life, but these tend to complement the *panda*s' roles, and individual ascetics have greater latitude to shape their roles. This variety and

flexibility have allowed some ascetics to adjust more successfully to Hardwar's changing social environment and take greater advantage of the opportunities it brings.

Hardwar has a long history as an ascetic center, and ascetics and their institutions have visibly shaped Hardwar's social and economic life. Most prominent among these are the Dashanami *sanyasi akhara*s, militant organizations ("regiments") whose members were drawn from most of the ten Dashanami subgroups.[1] As noted in chapter 3, during the eighteenth century these *akhara*s were Hardwar's ruling power, and they have remained influential since then. With the advent of British rule, their power basis shifted from military force to their influence as wealthy landowners, and this power was reflected in their relationship with the British government, which reinforced *sanyasi* status by delegating powers to the *mahant*s during festivals .[2] In the early twentieth century, ascetic bodies were the district's largest landowners, and although land reforms have since diminished their holdings, they retain considerable influence. This influence is clearly shown through various high-profile activities. Some of these are explicitly intended to transmit religious or cultural values: their temples are sacred centers, and they sponsor religious events. Other activities seem more like public service—medical dispensaries, schools, and free kitchens—and the Niranjani *akhara* also runs a library, reinforcing the image of promoting literate culture.[3]

Yet it also seems fair to characterize the *akhara*s as in decline, precisely because their deeply entrenched institutions have made them less adaptable to social change. Their influence primarily stems from their control over land, and this has become less important with the advent of different sources of wealth. One response to this change has been to take part in this new economy. In the 1950s, the Niranjani *akhara* raised capital by selling land in the Sharvan Nath Nagar neighborhood and invested it in commercial ventures, such as large hotels, to reap benefits from the tourist economy.[4] From all reports, the *sanyasi mahant*s are good businessmen, they are committed to managing the *akhara*s' resources, and they still control considerable wealth. Yet a more fundamental change has been the *akhara*s' declining importance even within the ascetic world. Even fifty years ago, the *akhara*s were the center of ascetic life, and joining an *akhara* was a necessary step to become a powerful ascetic—which required years of service and paying one's dues before finally gaining any benefit. This is no longer true. The *akhara*s still control many of Hardwar's most important temples, they are still the Kumbha Mela's central ritual agents, and they are still very wealthy, but they don't have a lot of warm bodies, as the 1998 Kumbha Mela processions clearly showed. Some *sanyasi akharas* had processions with only a few dozen members, and even

the Juna *akhara* (the largest) had only a few hundred.[5] One factor behind declining *akhara* membership has been that ascetics now have another viable option to gaining power, namely, being an "ashram baba"—an entrepreneurial ascetic who founds his (or, far more rarely, her) own institution and seeks independent patronage from Hardwar's residents and visitors. For an ambitious ascetic, running one's own ashram is a far quicker path to success; as the ashram head, one is immediately the master of one's own house, without having to earn seniority through years of service. This changing ascetic paradigm also reflects Hardwar's shifting religious economy: the most desirable patrons are now businessmen, not landowners, and many of them patronize charismatic individuals rather than sectarian institutions (Gross 1992: 461). Finally, a successful ashram baba can eventually seek legitimation from the *akhara*s by becoming a Mandaleshvar ("Lord of the Region"); this symbolic position makes him (or, more rarely, her) the *akhara*'s spiritual adviser, and the teacher to its members.[6]

Another problem for the *akhara*s has been their internal strife, particularly the Juna *akhara*'s attempts to raise its status. The Juna *akhara* is one of the three major *sanyasi akhara*s, along with the Niranjanis and the Mahanirvanis. Since the early twentieth century, the Junas have been by far the largest *akhara*, and their numerical superiority has led them to seek commensurately greater public status. In the traditional Kumbha Mela bathing order–which directly reflects group status—the Junas had bathed as a subgroup to the Niranjanis and were thus publicly subordinate to them. The Junas had sought independent status since at least 1903 (HMI Sept. 1903: 17) but gained it only in 1962, when the Junas and Niranjanis agreed that the Junas would bathe first on Shivaratri and second on the two other bathing days (Charlu 1962: 53). This compromise lasted until the 1998 Kumbha Mela, when it fell apart on the second bathing day. On that day, the Junas seized first place in the bathing order as a way to demonstrate their position as the primary *akhara*, and a riot ensued. This attempt shows that public status displays (here shown by a group's place in the bathing order) are still extremely important, even though this bathing order no longer reflects the power to control the Mela itself—which is wielded by the government.

The *akhara*s' relative decline reflects social changes that have made *akhara* membership less necessary for ascetic success and thus diminished it as the dominant ascetic paradigm. Further, even though the *akhara*s still possess considerable wealth and influence, the *mahant*s who control them are clearly not typical ascetics, but an anomalous minority; they are the CEOs of wealthy institutional bodies and, as such, function much like other wealthy and powerful men.[7] The bulk of this chapter examines more typical—meaning poorer and

less influential—ascetics to look at who they are, how they live, and how the roles they play have helped them retain religious importance.

Identity and Attitudes

Among ascetics themselves, the central dividing line is between those who have taken formal initiation and those who have not. Initiates have become formal members of a particular ascetic group—they are *sanyasi*s, *bairagi*s, or Udasis—and they display this identity in their dress, decorations, ritual accoutrements, and objects of devotion.[8] (See Figure 6.1.) Noninitiates are considered to be householders (*grhastha*s), regardless of their dress or style of life. When I asked one ascetic how one could possibly distinguish a genuine ascetic—since anyone can don ascetic dress—I was told that ascetics had a coded language, based on a few simple questions, and that this code crossed sectarian boundaries.[9] Yet even though ascetics themselves stress the divide between initiates and noninitiates—which upholds their privileged status—this division is less important for outsiders, for two reasons. First, many noninitiates dress, act, and function socially like initiated ascetics, and this makes it difficult for an outsider to perceive any functional difference between these groups. More important, these monastic orders are not centralized religious bodies. Each local institution—*math*, ashram, or trust—is more or less independent, as are its members. As van der Veer notes of Ayodhya's Ramanandi ascetics: "There is no central authority which decides upon doctrinal and organizational matters. Every *sadhu* may go and roam throughout India, teaching, within certain limits, his own religious message, and great value is put on that freedom of the *sadhu*. Moreover, any *sadhu* can be chosen by any layman as his guru" (1989: 75). Given this fluidity, it seems clear that these ascetic groupings are extremely broad.

A careful look at individual ascetics further reveals nearly endless variety in ascetic styles, beliefs, and practices. *Sanyasi*s are divided into *dandi*s and *naga*s. The *dandi*s trace their spiritual lineage directly from the philosopher Shankaracharya and are often well versed in Sanskrit and classical learning, whereas the *naga*s were warrior ascetics who made their living as traders and mercenary soldiers. Some Vaishnava ascetics worship Krishna, but most worship Rama and Sita, yet even within this latter group one finds striking differences. *Rasik*s ("aesthetes") focus their worship on Rama and Sita's domestic bliss as a newly married couple and imagine themselves as being the deities' servants and companions during the divinities' daily lives. *Tyagi*s emphasize strict renunciation and seek to emulate Rama's life in the forest during his fourteen-year exile; the



FIGURE 6.1. Balak Das, a Ramanandi *sadhu*. His printed shawl and his forehead markings identify him as a devotee of Rama (the vertical white stripes on his forehead symbolize Rama's footprints, and the streak in the center is a symbol of Rama's wife Sita).

strictest *tyagi*s take vows that can include renouncing woven garments or dwelling under shelter (Lamb 2006: 180). The *bairagi naga*s are Vaishnava militant ascetics, who, like the *sanyasi naga*s, used to earn their living as soldiers and traders.

Aside from differences in worship and ascetic style, these groups have considerable differences in status, which often reflect worldly status differences. *Dandi sanyasi*s initiate only brahmins, and in general, a group's status correlates with the strictness of its membership criteria. In other cases, social distinctions are determined by a group's internal factors. Among Vaishnavas, *rasik* worship tends to center on temples and have the greatest connection with householders, and both of these factors have highlighted ritual purity concerns. *Rasik* abbots are always brahmins, and only ascetics coming from the "twice-born" groups

may enter their temples' inner shrines (Fuller 2004: 168).[10] Other signs indicate that even among renunciants, an ascetic's former social position influenced his current status: one *sanyasi naga* scornfully informed me that the Juna *akhara* accepted "low" people, and Gross reports that *bairagi*s from "unclean" Shudra and Untouchable groups sit separately when meals are served (1992: 145). Other status differences are economic: established ascetics with stable residences and incomes have higher status than itinerant wanderers, who in dress and bearing seem little different from any beggar in Hardwar. These ascetics are thus an extended "family" with nearly unlimited instances.

Despite this variety, a few things are almost universally true. Ascetics tend not to have regular families and households, although ascetic initiation entails leaving one's blood family for a "family" based on a guru-disciple lineage. Many ascetics describe their purpose not only as seeking God but also as serving God through serving others. Whereas householders are primarily concerned for their families, ascetics are supposed to transcend such attachments, and one venue for service to others is their hospitality to visitors. They should ideally be celibate, not only because this shows detachment—and control over a fundamental human drive—but also because retaining semen is believed to generate spiritual energy. Here reality and ideal sometimes diverge, although such lapses are generally kept quiet.[11] The most important similarity is the notion that ascetics possess some sort of power, although there are varying conceptions of its nature and source. Such power may be mechanically generated through celibacy or other ascetic practices (*tapa*s), it may result from devotion to God or intensive ritual practice, or it may reflect the superhuman powers (*siddhi*) believed to be the by-product of religious practice. Whatever their source, these powers are felt to reveal something essential about these individuals and to authenticate their religious attainment.

This stress on power is critical to understanding how ordinary people perceive ascetics. By itself, power is ambiguous—it can be used by all sorts of people for all sorts of ends, and it has no necessary connection with goodness, purity, or morality. Although some ascetics can only be described as saintly, many others are far more marginal. One telling sign of this marginal quality is that Hardwar's bogeyman is Mota Baba ("fat ascetic"), who was invoked when our landlord's children were naughty. The children were genuinely afraid of him, and when an ascetic came to the house by chance one day, they ran in terror, convinced that Mota Baba had come to claim them.[12] Another indication of this deep-seated ambivalence can be seen from Jim Corbett's report that villagers in the Garhwal hills attributed all tiger and leopard fatalities to ascetic shape-shifters, whose purported motive was lust for human flesh and blood (1988: 18–21).

Such images reflect highly ambivalent attitudes toward ascetics. One can easily understand an ambivalence for wanderers with no identification, no past, no family, and no social network—all the things that create an ordinary identity.[13] Such anonymity makes householders initially wary when interacting with *sadhus*, since one never knows with whom one is dealing at first.[14] For genuine renunciants, obliterating one's past identity is an important religious practice; it lets one leave one's former life behind and form a new identity unaffected by it. Yet this notion has clear advantages to anyone in trouble with the law, and some ascetics are common criminals who have taken on ascetic clothing to avoid punishment.[15] Most people treat ascetics respectfully as a matter of course, but any unknown ascetic will also be subject to suspicion and doubt.[16]

This ambivalence is partly attributable to some ascetics' antisocial tendencies. They are often characterized as unpredictable and quick to anger, and any interaction with them carries potential danger. It is not uncommon for ascetics to abuse (verbally or even physically) people who displease them, and to do so in ways that would be unthinkable or unacceptable in normal society. Such latitude reflects their marginal social status and their independence from ordinary behavioral codes. Lurking underneath this uncertainty is the threat of actual violence, and my only physical altercation in India was with an ascetic who believed (mistakenly) that I had taken his picture.[17] In extreme cases, this violence is sheer banditry, as in the case of one ascetic who had been beaten and robbed by some Shaiva *nagas*.

Everyone in Hardwar knows that all kinds of people become ascetics and for all sorts of reasons. The ideal *sadhu* is seeking spiritual attainment through renunciation and intense religious practice, and this path is fraught with pitfalls, particularly the danger of being seduced by the powers (*siddhi*) described as the by-product of this practice and losing sight of one's true goal. Success requires many years of selfless practice, which one ascetic characterized as surrendering everything to God and letting God take care of things. Such genuine saints are believed to be very rare; the general estimate was that real ascetics were only 5 or 10 percent of the whole. They are also difficult to find, since they are said to prefer a quiet life and have no desire to attract disciples.[18]

Many ascetics are believed to be frauds of one sort or another—people who take up ascetic life as a means of livelihood but have no deep call to religious life. I have already mentioned that criminals may become ascetics to escape punishment, but there are plenty of other reasons. Miller and Wertz (1996: 77–84) and Gross (1992: 99, 415–16) note that many men who became ascetics did so in response to some unbearable, irresolvable life crisis: business failure, a bad marriage, economic hopelessness, or the loss of all kin ties, such as a Bengali ascetic I met in 1986, whose entire family had been killed during Partition. In

an otherwise tightly structured society, renunciation provides a socially acceptable response to such crises. Low-caste people may become ascetics to upgrade their social status—such as the ascetic who told me he had been a bicycle-rickshaw puller in Old Delhi—and for many poor people, an ascetic standard of living certainly is no worse and potentially much better than their present one, since it taps into an entirely different support network (Gross 1992: 134, 417). Some ascetics are simply vagrants and idlers, for whom ascetic life legitimizes begging as a means of support. Finally, over the years, I have noticed a significant percentage of ascetics with physical disabilities—loss of a limb, blindness, birth defects, or dwarfism—and the difficulty in living a normal life with these disabilities may have aligned them toward ascetic life. As Lamb so eloquently states: "Traditionally, males who possess proficiency and prosperity attain power and position. Conversely, those who have little or do little materially are generally regarded as useless, unable, and unworthy. Yet it is in this latter direction that ascetics and monks have traditionally endeavored to move" (2006: 166).

If most ascetics have no real attainment, how can one discern which ones are genuine? Given the fluidity of the ascetic ideal and the wide variety of ascetic styles, there can clearly be no uniform standard. Groups emphasizing asceticism may denigrate learning as a waste of time, groups stressing devotion may see learning as a manifestation of egoism, and learned ascetics may characterize the others as lazy and stupid.[19] Yet even though learning brings cultural respectability, it guarantees neither spiritual attainment nor moral probity. During my initial fieldwork in 1989, one learned ascetic allegedly regularly sodomized his students—a clear abuse of his role as a teacher. In the end, distinguishing genuine ascetics is a complex contextual calculation, based partly on what they say and do, but ultimately on who they are, for their lives must be consistent with their messages.[20] This sort of evaluation is a constant process, and although one finds profound skepticism regarding ascetics in general, most people encounter enough genuine ascetics to keep this ideal vibrant and meaningful. Such men (and women) appear in many different guises—learned and unlettered, gentle and abrasive, rough-hewn and refined, quiet and boisterous—but their charisma and air of spiritual attainment automatically attract people.[21] This aura is one of the things supposedly marking a genuine ascetic, and even skeptical people are rarely disrespectful, for fear of insulting someone with genuine powers.

Economic Arrangements

Whatever their attainments and practices, all ascetics still need life's basic necessities, and their means of support are as varied as their personalities and

messages. As mentioned earlier, some ascetic institutions are extremely wealthy, and anyone with access to these resources has no material worries—indeed, their *mahant*s reportedly devote considerable time to managing the institution's economic affairs.[22] Social custom requires *mahant*s to use some of these resources to provide for poorer ascetics, particularly during festivals, but because the traditional pattern gives the *mahant* complete control over the organization's assets, an *akhara*'s junior members may receive only life's most basic necessities.[23] Some people are content to wait patiently for their share, but many are unwilling to give up their independence for so long. As mentioned before, changing social circumstances have made being an independent ashram baba a viable economic alternative, and this is one reason behind the *akhara*s' declining membership.[24]

Regardless of whether they have taken formal initiation, most ascetics are economic free agents and depend for their livelihood on their own resources, personalities, and capabilities. They live a variety of lifestyles in a variety of settings, and although a few are quite wealthy, most are poor. On one hand, poverty can be embraced as a religious discipline to minimize attachment and to promote trust in God. On a more practical level, the difficulties generally caused by poverty are partly offset by a low standard of living that gives rise to very few genuine needs, and a mutual support network that shares the available resources. As Gross repeatedly emphasizes, ascetic life is highly adaptive and can bring a livelihood even under the most adverse circumstances (1992: 199). One key adaptive strategy is itinerancy. Since ascetics tend to be supported by a community's surplus wealth, continual movement reduces the demand on any particular community and maximizes donations by increasing the yield area (Gross 1992: 133). Itinerancy tends to reflect sectarian patterns, and pilgrimage sites draw greater numbers for both religious and practical reasons, since their local religious economies provide ready sources of patronage. Ascetic life provides a basic living for men who may have been underemployed or unemployed in light of India's large surplus labor force; as such, it is an alternate lifestyle that provides both material and psychological validation (Gross 1992: 111).

Shelter is another basic human need. Itinerants without other resources in Hardwar—such as an *akhara* or another institution upon whose hospitality they can call—most commonly stay on Rori Island, across the canal supply channel from the town. This is the center for Hardwar's most transient population, including poor pilgrims, and each morning finds hundreds or thousands of people camping there. (See Figure 6.2.) Rori's proximity to town makes it convenient, and the pedestrian traffic brings constant patronage, but living there is precarious because one is squatting on Irrigation Department land. Since Indian law reportedly gives squatters title to any land occupied for twelve

years, the local government periodically destroys all unauthorized structures—usually by cutting through the supporting posts and completely removing the huts, so that the materials cannot be reused.[25] One seemingly successful counterstrategy is to erect a temple, since the authorities seem more reluctant to destroy these, but Rori's general uncertainty discourages many resident ascetics from living there.[26] There are other places where one can build without fear of demolition, particularly the Forest Department land near Nildhara, but this is farther from town and consequently gets less traffic and patronage. Resident ascetics with regular income usually rent rooms in houses, ashrams, or *dharamshala*s, since having a stable residence is one way to raise one's ascetic status. Ascetics with more substantial resources (or greater fund-raising skills) build or acquire their own ashrams, which carry the highest status of all. Control over an ashram's resources not only makes one financially independent but also brings opportunities to enhance one's status by providing patronage, such as sponsoring religious programs or feeding poor ascetics. This enhanced status, in turn, paves the way for future patronage.

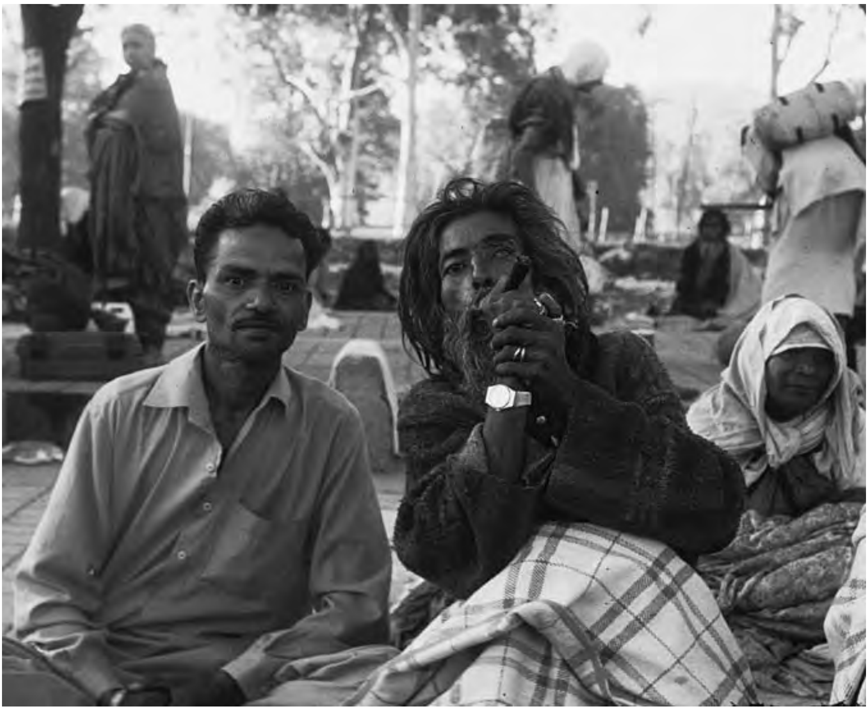


FIGURE 6.2. *Aghori sadhu* Bhoot Das and friend enjoying their morning smoke. *Aghori* ascetics consciously violate social norms to point out the conventional nature of these norms. They were camping on Rori Island, where many transient ascetics stay.

After shelter, food is another basic human need. Given Hardwar's charitable institutions, mere subsistence is rarely an issue, and many poor ascetics get their food from *annakshetra*s.[27] These institutions ensure regular nourishment and a minimum standard of living, but patronizing them has negative status connotations. Despite ostensibly having renounced the world and its concerns, ascetics tend to be highly status-conscious—both with regard to their status as ascetics vis-à-vis householders and their status differences with other ascetics. One important marker in this status rating is what one eats and how one obtains it. This may be because eating is such a primal need that it provides inevitable comparisons, or it may reflect how food preparation and consumption mark status in conventional Indian society. Food preparation and consumption are also connected with notions of ritual purity to which ascetics are not immune, in which giving and taking food—or refusing it—defines status between individuals and groups. *Annekshetra* food is cooked for no one in particular, and those who eat it have no control over what is cooked or who has prepared it. Cooking one's own food brings higher status by demonstrating economic independence, as well as a sense of keeping oneself separate. Another status marker is food specifically prepared for one by another person, which indicates the ability to attract service. A final option to promote status is fasting, which allows one to avoid subordinate status (as a "taker") and at the same time demonstrate control over one's body. These status considerations, combined with the generally poor quality of *annakshetra* food, more or less ensure that they are patronized only by those with no other options.[28]

Even though *annakshetra* food lowers one's status rating by demonstrating dependence on others, at the same time begging for alms is an established means of livelihood, and Gross points out that one benefit of becoming an ascetic is legitimating begging (1992: 417). Many ascetics get what they need simply by asking for it—whether it is a cup of tea, a meal, clothing, soap, medicine, or train fare to another place. To be sure, asking and getting are two different things—I have witnessed many fruitless requests and refused my share of them—but many people still support renunciants. Hardwar's visitors provide a relatively reliable flow of patronage, since giving alms is one of the most common pilgrimage rites, but so do Hardwar's residents, and in one chance moment, I saw a neighbor lady—herself lower-middle class—give a handful of chapatis to a *sadhu* sitting patiently outside her home.[29] Ascetics have various strategies to induce donations, among them flatteringly describing a potential patron as a "deity in human form" (*manushya bhagavan*)—in other words, that by providing the necessities of life, the donor becomes like a god to them. English-speaking *sadhu*s may seek patronage from foreigners, who not only are relatively wealthy but also may also respond to stories and friendly overtures.[30]

A more sophisticated form of begging is to establish an organization devoted to some social or political cause and then to solicit contributions to carry this out; these organizations can be found at every economic level. The most successful can be very wealthy, such as Swami Satyamitrananda Giri's Bharat Mata Mandir, but many are far less substantial.[31] At the lowest end are institutions such as the Heart of India (Bharat Hrday) Ashram, a small enclosure built on the Irrigation Department land on Rori Island in 1990. Several signboards proclaimed that the resident swami was devoting his attention to India's most pressing problems—hatred between different Hindu communities, Hindu-Muslim tensions, corruption, environmental degradation, and terrorism—and the ashram had a printed magazine that detailed the swami's efforts and solicited financial help. Despite these exalted claims, the ashram was extremely humble: an old tent, a few folding beds, and some broken-down chairs. In later months, the original signboards were replaced with larger ones, but their grand rhetoric clashed with the ashram's poor condition. The denouement came when the Irrigation Department destroyed all of Rori's unauthorized construction. The fence posts and signboards were cut off at ground level and removed, and there were no further attempts at construction.

A more successful attempt was that of Mrtyunjay Swami, who in 1976 established an ashram on the Forest Department land at Nildhara, the main channel of the Ganges. The ashram grounds contain the *samadhi* stone of Ramakishen (Ramakrishna) Van, which was inscribed in 1715 CE.[32] One can easily see how such a shrine could reinforce Mrtyunjay's authority, as well as support his right to live there. In 1990, Mrtyunjay put up signboards bearing the inscription's text and translation, as well as his own message. Whereas the Bharat Hrday swami had devoted his attention to many pressing problems, Mrtyunjay's billboard described him as receiving a divine command to "undertake scientific and spiritual efforts to protect the human race from nuclear weapons." The billboard's closing text noted that the ashram had been restored with the help of scientists, workers, ordinary people, and religious seekers, doubtless as a way to encourage further donations. In 1998, the billboard had become far less specific, saying only that the swami had been called "to promote human virtue (*manav dharma*) and to spread a message of peace"—perhaps reflecting the declining concern about nuclear weapons and an attempt to seek a more productive avenue for patronage. In both of these cases, people sought patronage by making promises that were clearly beyond their power to fulfill, although Swami Mrtyunjay's institution was stable enough to survive his death in April 1990.

Despite being sanctioned as a means of livelihood, many ascetics have mixed feelings about begging. It can potentially grant people independence by

freeing them from the need to earn a living, so that they can completely devote themselves to religious life. Yet it can also make people even more dependent and parasitic, by becoming a "job" through which one "earns" a livelihood. One ascetic observed that begging was useful for breaking down the ego, since it opened one up to rejection and abuse, but that for many, it had merely become a way to make a living—an end, rather than a means. A similar opinion was voiced by a wandering ascetic, who supported his wanderings with his income from landholdings in Madhya Pradesh. He admitted that a landowning itinerant ascetic was highly irregular but stressed that this income gave him the independence to pursue spiritual life, without having to depend on anyone or anything.

This last account points to an important truth: despite the ascetic ideal of renouncing everything, everyone has basic needs and requires some basic level of support. Many world religions commend voluntary poverty as a spiritual discipline—to simplify one's life, to weaken attachments to the world, and to promote surrender and trust in God—but in most cases, this ideal is only imperfectly realized, and many ascetics earn some sort of income. Resident ascetics may be petty shopkeepers selling life's everyday necessities such as cigarettes, bidis, matches, and soap, whereas itinerant ascetics may traffic in *rudraksha*s, *shaligram*s, and hashish—valuable items that can simply be picked up free during their wandering. Other ascetics are entrepreneurs, such as the ascetic who published a "Who's Who of Hindu Ascetics" during the 1986 Kumbha Mela, enrolling several hundred ascetics for a reported fee of one thousand rupees each.[33] This was his most successful idea, but he was almost always hatching some sort of money-making scheme, and his standard of living directly reflected the success of his latest venture.[34] Other ascetics participate in Hardwar's pervasive commission business, such as the one hired by a local shopkeeper under the pretense that the ascetic was his guru. For a while, this arrangement worked well. The ascetic's religious status inspired confidence in people and discouraged them from haggling over the price he "dictated" to the owner. Things finally unraveled, according to the owner, when he caught the ascetic trying to pass off a plastic necklace as coral, a fraud potentially much more damaging to the owner than to his salesman.[35]

Regardless of whether this story was true—and I heard only the owner's version—everyone knows the darker side of Hardwar's ascetic life. Aside from the everyday deceptions committed while making a living, there were more persistent rumors that some ascetics, particularly the transients living on Rori Island, were involved in all sorts of unsavory and illegal business—-gambling, drug peddling, theft, extortion, and even murder. Some locals avoided walking on Rori after dark because of the potential for unpleasantness, and several

itinerant ascetics told me that they had spent the night elsewhere because they had heard that Rori was too dangerous. Some of this may be rumor and paranoia, but it probably contains some truth, for it is commonly accepted that a certain percentage of itinerant ascetics are common criminals. The anonymity of life on Rori, and of ascetic life in general, can sometimes make crime a viable means of livelihood, and this reality reinforces people's ambivalent perspectives.

Gurus and Disciples

The ascetic livelihood with the highest status is as a guru (spiritual preceptor) supported by one's disciples. It is also the least common, and an ascetic's ability to do this is a commentary to having "something" that attracts both followers and support. Gurus need not be ascetics—the only necessary thing is to have disciples—and Hardwar has had some notable nonascetic gurus, such as the Gayatri Parivar's Shri Ram Sharma, a brahmin householder whose wife succeeded him after his death, and the Manav Utthan Seva Samiti's Satpal Maharaj, a Rajput householder and member of Parliament (McKean 1996: 45–57). In some cases, marriage is required, as for a "tantric" guru I met at the Kumbha Mela in 1998, whose wife was treated as the embodiment of *kundalini*. Despite these exceptions, most gurus are ascetics, and from an ascetic perspective, this is the ideal relationship with householders, since it reinforces ascetics' sense of spiritual superiority. This section specifically examines the economic aspects of this relationship, whereas the following section looks at the roles and functions teachers play.

In its ideal form, the guru-disciple relationship is based on mutual obligations and reflects central Hindu values. According to this ideal, a disciple chooses a guru based on the latter's spiritual attainments, and only after long and careful scrutiny. Although a guru is deemed essential for spiritual advancement, note that in this model it is the disciple who approaches the guru, and not the reverse. Of course, the prospective guru must agree to accept the disciple and may often refuse—sometimes as a strategy to test a disciple's sincerity and persistence, and sometimes because the disciple is deemed unsuitable. Once committed, each party has obligations to the other, based on the principle of mutual service (*seva*). The guru takes responsibility for the disciple's personal and spiritual development—such complete responsibility that gurus are said to take on their disciples' karma—and in so doing must act only in the disciple's interests. For their part, disciples should surrender to their gurus—one typical formula calls for body (*tan*), mind (*man*), and wealth (*dhan*)—and serve the guru without

question. The guru-disciple relationship involves clear hierarchy and subordination, but it is based on the assumption that each party is acting selflessly.

This is a sound formula for spiritual development when the parties are truly selfless, and a recipe for egregious deception when they are not. Both parties can be at fault here, but since gurus hold greater power, their actions have correspondingly greater influence. A further complication is that both saints and charlatans may well say the same things—which are venerable cultural messages—that can used for a variety of ends, depending on the person's motive. One hears many tales of false gurus deceiving and manipulating others, and the cultural ideals of *seva* ("service") and surrender can be potent psychological weapons. Demands for service and surrender can be presented as tools to break the disciple's ego, and criticism of the guru's teachings or behavior can be dismissed as ego-centered "resistance"—signs that the disciple has not truly surrendered. Demands for service and the accusations of egoism can be highly effective strategies to enforce conformity and obedience, particularly where others reinforce these messages.[36]

For better or worse, this sacred bond is a clear intersection between religion and business, and unscrupulous people can use it for their own benefit. This is particularly dangerous for foreigners, who are valued as sources of money, status, and access to foreign markets, and who are often completely unaware that ascetics might be spiritual con men. To say it most baldly, successful gurus receive patronage from their disciples, and wherever there is money involved, people try to get some of it for themselves. Baba Amarnath frequently said that religion was the best business in the world, for it had no start-up costs and no inventory, and one received tangible goods for intangible ones. In the worst cases, being a guru becomes a passport to a life beyond most people's reach—wearing silk robes, eating rich food, living in air-conditioned comfort, and flaunting the latest electronic gadgets. Aside from questions of money—and many ascetics genuinely disdain wealth—there are subtler issues of status and control. Being supported by one's disciples not only confers material benefits but, more important, also confers status vis-à-vis one's peers and validates one's identity as a spiritual leader. Such status enhances one's standing in the market, reinforces one's claims to spiritual power, and makes it more likely that one will receive future support.

Of course, there are other challenges besides simply raising money. Another conflict is the tension between raising enough money to satisfy life's minimum desires, and the need to appear detached from the world and thus worthy of such patronage. This tension is neither new nor unique to India but is present wherever one finds patronage networks, as Judith Adler notes when discussing the Christian Desert Fathers:

> To be perceived as authentic, a holy man had to appear to disdain the world; yet the social worlds of asceticism were built upon personal reputation, and exemplary lives could fulfill their redemptive purpose only through social report. Visitors were essential to the transmission of reputation, and (as modern ethnography confirms) long-distance, wealthy visitors, bearing tribute in which others could share, enhanced a saint's local standing. (2002: 40)

In the same way, one of the most basic patronage strategies is to profess profound disinterest in money, status, or worldly goods, even if one is quite wealthy—as Raper observed two centuries ago (1979: 456). Any guru openly desiring such things is clearly acting from selfish motives and thus still enmeshed in the world, whereas denying any desire for these things demonstrates detachment and enhances authenticity—and thus makes one a more desirable recipient.

This strategy can continue even after a guru has become financially successful and seemingly lives an upper-class life. Many financially successful ascetics buttress their authenticity by recounting stories about their past practice—stories that usually include poverty, hardship, and intense religious practice during which they had to depend on God alone. Such validating narratives reinforce ascetic authenticity by establishing their genuine detachment from the world—despite an apparently comfortable and luxurious life—and implicitly assert that the ascetic's worldly success is both the fruit of this practice and evidence of divine care. Another important assumption is the belief that a genuinely holy life cannot be hidden—that God will provide for such persons and eventually lead people to them (Adler 2002: 39). Such saintly luminousness renders seeking disciples unnecessary, since they are drawn to the saint as naturally as bees to flowering plants.[37]

Of course, this ideal is also imperfectly realized, and ascetics use various strategies to broadcast their spiritual accomplishments. The simplest method is to tell people directly, yet unless one's stories and claims flow naturally in conversation, this may well strike the hearers as self-promotion—which would be unnecessary for a true saint, since God leads people to them. Another common strategy is to have one's disciples spread these stories. This creates an appropriate distance from the actual guru, who can maintain an air of humility and dispassion, yet at the same time ensures that these stories become known. Whether spoken directly or whispered in hushed tones, the lessons and values in these stories enhance a guru's status. Higher profile gurus can use mass media (print, radio, television, audio, and video) or spread their message through signs and billboards. At the Kumbha Melas in both 1986 and 1998,

Pilot Baba (who had formerly been a member of the Indian Air Force) bought billboard space on the Delhi-Hardwar road, right where Hardwar-bound vehicles stopped to pay the road tax.[38] Asa Ram Bapu, another successful guru, devoted an entire wall of his booth at the 1998 Kumbha Mela to a comic-book-style portrayal of his spiritual career—including attaining full enlightenment in 1964—and also hired a loudspeaker truck to broadcast his praises through Hardwar's streets. Both men are clearly using standard advertising strategies, but the visible signs of their success—in the size of their compounds and the number of their devotees—reassure hearers of their authenticity.[39]

I received many different sales pitches while wandering around Hardwar, since it was generally assumed that I had come there to find a guru, smoke hash, or both. Several people tried the direct approach, perhaps figuring that since foreigners are idiots, I wouldn't know any better. One older man with whom I talked at Har-ki-Pairi kept telling me that I could call him "Guruji" and said that his "many" foreign disciples did the same. The most transparent pitch came from a *sadhu* who first made me a cup of tea and then trotted out a shopping list for my initiation: new clothing for him, fruit and sweets for *puja*, and finally his *dakshina* ("preceptor's fee") "according to your means." I excused myself after he announced that unless I took initiation he could do nothing more for me, and when I told a respected ascetic what had happened with him, she laughed scornfully and said people like him knew nothing about spiritual life: "They meet foreigners in the marketplace, trap them with words, and then make fools of them."

More sophisticated attempts involved a third party making the initial contact with a prospective disciple and then bringing that person to meet the guru—or, as one colleague pithily described it, "pimping." This seemingly distances the guru from seeking out disciples and at the same time ensures contact, particularly if the disciple is an effective go-between. During the 1998 Kumbha Mela, a young lodger at my house struck up a conversation with me on the porch and then led me up to their room to meet his father, a "tantric" guru, who deprecated my external research in comparison with his inner wisdom. In 1990, a California man living as a *bairagi sadhu* took me to meet his ascetic guru, who offered to initiate me as well. In 1998, that same Californian had severed all ties with his guru and spoke bitterly of serving as the baba's front man to foreigners, who are more desirable devotees because they have more money and bring greater ascetic status. The baba reportedly used several simple tricks to convince people that he had some powers (*siddhi*), but he needed a front man because he spoke limited English and had little understanding of foreign culture. Here the partnership was successful until personal factors drove them apart.

The most sophisticated attempt—and the most understated—came from another guru-disciple pair in 1990. The disciple asked me, in English, whether I would like to sit and talk, and after I agreed, I found myself sitting with the guru directly across from me and the disciple to my right. We exchanged some pleasantries, but as our conversation progressed, the Hindi-speaking guru was clearly trying to filter our conversation through his English-speaking disciple. This would have been necessary for most foreigners, but since I spoke perfectly serviceable Hindi, I grew frustrated by his reluctance to speak to me directly. After listening to tired clichés contrasting Indian spirituality and Western materialism, and the need for complete faith in one's guru, I decided it was time for me to leave and refused to commit to a second meeting, despite the disciple's repeated questions about when I would come to see them again. This encounter was much subtler than the others—neither of them actually asked for anything, other than when I would come to see them again—yet it left me feeling unclean. This feeling was heightened when I learned that both men were local brahmins but that the disciple lived most of the year in France, where he ran a yoga center—giving him the necessary expertise to sell their product to foreigners.[40]

Since the guru-disciple relationship is hierarchical and the guru holds most of the power, it is not surprising that the dominant dysfunctional pattern involves the guru taking advantage of the disciple; this simply reflects this relationship's power imbalance. Indeed, it is not difficult to uncover all sorts of deceit, manipulation, and abuse of trust.[41] Yet as with all human relationships, this can work both ways, for one also finds disciples taking advantage of this relationship as shamelessly as any entrepreneurial guru. Authentic gurus accept their responsibilities to their disciples, and such teachers usually emphasize their duty to serve far more than their right to be served. The guru's service usually involves spiritual direction, but it can also be connected with pragmatic needs, and when these disciples have obtained what they want from a teacher, they may simply vanish.

Such fickle opportunism was a recurring complaint among ascetics. One of them, who claimed to be able to guarantee the birth of a son, complained that householders would come to him in times of distress but ignore him after their problem had been solved. This same complaint was echoed by another ascetic, who was reputedly a skilled Ayurvedic healer. Finally, since influential ascetics often have a wide range of contacts—often with wealthy or powerful people—unscrupulous people may become disciples to further their financial or personal goals.[42] During my initial stay in 1989–90, the clearest example of this seemed to be Amarnath's relationship with one particular family. When I arrived in October, they were his "dearest disciples," with the father and two

sons visiting every day. Amarnath's advice and local influence had helped them resolve some family problems, and he also had helped to arrange the marriage between the elder son and his grand-niece.[43] Yet after the marriage, the family cut him off, and Amarnath was convinced that they had used him. The first time he told me about it, he got so upset that he burned the food he was cooking, leaving every bite permeated with the fire of his rage, and for months, merely hearing their name sparked an embittered rendition of his service to those "ungrateful" people.

Yet things are not always as they seem. Just before leaving Hardwar in 1990, I ran into one of the sons, who alluded to his family's disillusionment with "that baba"—that at first they thought they had found a man with "something" but later discovered his fondness for intoxicants and his tendency to verbally abuse them. Here they were speaking the truth, yet I still found it striking that they had broken their ties with him only after the marriage. Ten years later, I finally learned the whole story—that on the wedding night, Amarnath had abused the groom in front of the entire wedding party, telling him that he was good for nothing. Although normally mild-mannered, such public humiliation prompted the son to give his family an ultimatum—that he would leave the family if they went to see Amarnath again. Faced with this choice, blood ultimately proved thicker than water.

Yet just before describing his family's disillusionment with Amarnath, my friend spoke most respectfully about another ascetic his family had known, as proof that real renunciants still existed. Even though people accept that most ascetics are corrupt, just about everybody can name at least one in whom they had real faith. One also finds this among ascetics themselves. Amarnath often rebuked me for "wasting my time" talking to roaming ascetics and urged me to search out the truly knowledgeable people. Despite my unfavorable assessment of most of the ascetics I met, there were a few who genuinely impressed me as having "something." Such figures enable people to keep faith in the ideal—which the corruption, greed, and failure of individual ascetics can never destroy—and their presence is one of the crucial factors for Hardwar's continuing religious vitality.

Gurus and Disciples—Roles and Patterns

A guru's influence ultimately stems from the conviction that his (or her) spiritual attainment can illuminate and empower every area of life. Yet gurus have widely differing styles, characteristics, and messages, and despite the widely held assumption that enlightened beings can tailor their teachings to fit any

individual's capacities, choosing a guru seems clearly influenced by questions of compatibility.[44] This section examines the roles that ascetics play as teachers, healers, and advisers. All of these roles are implicit in the idea of a spiritual guide, and one finds that "spiritual" guides are constantly involved with all sorts of practical concerns.[45] In fulfilling these roles, it seems unusual for teachers to give people something right away—during the initial encounter, they listen to people's problems and give them general advice, but their real efforts are devoted to the people with whom they have an established relationship.[46]

In many cases, a guru's ability to help others can be tied to perfectly explicable factors. Amarnath's reputation as a successful entrepreneur—he founded a company offering package tours to the Himalayan shrines—meant that people came to him for business advice, and several people attributed their financial success to his counsel. His initial advice was often fairly general, but he was intimately involved in the financial affairs of his "dear ones," and their eagerness for his advice reflected their respect for his business acumen. In the same way, people may go to gurus for advice on legal, financial, or even criminal matters, since their experience and expertise in these domains can make them invaluable resources. Another explicable source of success is old-fashioned brokering. Respected figures often have influential contacts, and these can resolve seemingly intractable problems. Examples for this are legion, and this sort of influence is one reason that ascetics are both powerful and sought-after. For example, when a factory owner refused to pay an engineer who was one of Amarnath's disciples, Amarnath's contacts with a high-ranking police officer quickly changed the owner's mind. When a hotel owner felt that a building inspector was harassing him, a different guru's influence effected the inspector's transfer to the poorest sector in Hardwar district—where the potential for bribes was greatly diminished.

As with all social capital, this sort of influence must be exercised judiciously to prevent it from being exhausted when it is really needed. Important officials may have regard for gurus but may also refuse to be at their beck and call. Hence, such influence-peddling tends to be deployed for those in the inner circle, from whom the guru has already received service or the prospect to call on it in the future. The two cases just mentioned illustrate this perfectly. The engineer and his family had more or less raised Amarnath's youngest daughter, which not only allowed him to come and go as he pleased, but also gave her the sort of stable, normal home life that would have been impossible for a *sadhu*. In the second case, the guru requested the hotel owner to reserve a block of rooms for his out-of-town disciples during the 1998 Kumbha Mela at a price far below the market rate. Of course, the disciples who received these cut-rate rooms were also being rewarded for past service and at the same time set up for

future obligations. In this way, successful ascetics center themselves in a social web, matching one person's needs with another's capacities and collecting patronage as resources flow in each direction. Such an ascetic may well wander about with his rosary in one hand and his cell phone in the other.

In some cases, ascetics give simple advice, but the force of their authority induces people to follow it. When a disciple asked Amarnath, "What should I do?" Amarnath told him two things: to keep his place neat and clean and to care for his mother. The first was important, he was told, because one's surroundings affect one's mind; this made ordering his environment a step toward inner stability. The latter command reflects traditional Indian values, and Amarnath ordered him to take this as his primary responsibility. There is nothing mysterious about either command—in almost any society, the former would be good basic advice and the latter standard moral training—but they helped to transform this man, who until then had been an irresponsible son. The instructions may well be very simple and yet at the same time exactly what a person needs.

All these things can be ascribed to perfectly rational factors, such as giving people simple but practical advice or having enough influential contacts to make things happen. Yet another prominent factor attracting people to ascetics is the belief that their spiritual attainments have given them superhuman powers (*siddhis*)—whether to read people's thoughts, predict the future, bestow progeny, or perform various other wonders.[47] In light of such assumptions, authority and power are mutually reinforcing: people gain authority because of the belief that they have powers, and their authority gives them the power to make people believe that they can do these things. Ascetics are as aware of this as anyone else, and since the key factor here seems to be convincing others that one actually has powers, one finds all sorts of promotional strategies.

One such strategy is claiming to be a tantric adept. This generates both respect and fear, since tantrism is associated with the ability to perform "effective black magic" (Brooks 1990: 5). During my association with him, Amarnath told me some unusual tales from his past and would sometimes allude to tantra as religious practice, but he never claimed to have powers, leaving this to the hearer's imagination—and to the loyalty of his disciples, who described his tantric powers in whispered asides.[48] Many of these stories involved clairvoyance or prognostication, and here one can infer more mundane reasons for successful predictions: he had been a successful businessman before "running away," his constant reading kept him extremely well informed, and he was a generally perceptive judge of character—all of which could lead him to make predictions that might often come true.[49] One finds this same discernment among many better known ascetics, who are not only careful listeners but also perceptive judges of their visitors' nature and motives. The best known have a

constant stream of supplicants, which gives them plenty of opportunity for practice. When combined with a willingness to help people, these personal qualities make them effective teachers and healers, and this creates a buzz that attracts even more people.

The most dramatic attestations to these superhuman powers come in the stories about healing. Sometimes this is physical healing, usually after the doctors have given up hope.[50] One man confided that when his son lay in a coma after a brain hemorrhage, their guru appeared and reassured the father that the son would be fine—and nine days later his son regained consciousness and was perfectly fine. Another man described how an ascetic stood by his cousin's bedside, announced that his cousin's tuberculosis had been healed, and told the family to throw the medicines into the Ganges. The medicines were so expensive that the man's father proposed that they merely suspend treatment temporarily, to which the ascetic had no objection, but from that day the fever and coughing disappeared, and a subsequent x-ray showed that his lungs were completely clear. Perhaps the most common medical issue is infertility, and here the profound cultural pressures to have male children intensify the sadness and distress felt by any infertile couple. Since infertility can have psychological as well as physical causes, one can also see how an unexpected conception could be attributed to an ascetic's miraculous powers.[51]

These claims are radically different from the claim to be able to read minds and to predict the future. It seems pointless to judge whether ascetics really have magic powers enabling them to cure diseases on command, since one could also cite faith healings in twentieth-century America, which from a scientific perspective seem equally inexplicable. In both cases, one essential element seems to be the patient's faith in the healer—the psychological effect of a healthy mind in creating a healthy body. So regardless of whether ascetics really possess such powers, the fact that people believe they do is itself a powerful force. A contributing factor in building such trust could be that some ascetics have considerable medical skills, whether in traditional medical systems such as Ayurveda or through practical experience based on their itinerant life, in which knowing medicinal plants and remedies is a valuable and sometimes vital asset.

Magic powers aside, it seems indisputable that ascetics play important roles in many people's lives, especially as advisers and healers. Their effectiveness can partly be attributed to factors inherent in their ascetic status: they are marginal figures with no vested interests, which lets them examine things more objectively, yet this status also gives them the authority to command people.[52] Still, there is no denying that some ascetics do this with greater skill, and the more successful ones seem to be better able to discern the heart of a problem

from the evidence at hand and to propose a solution that the parties can accept.

One important role is helping to mediate and resolve family problems, including marital and sexual problems. Despite Indian cultural homage to the ideal of the joint family, living in one can also cause considerable stress, particularly for female and younger family members, who have less power. Stressors can include economic inequity in which a few working members support the entire family, child marriages and the miserable condition of many new brides, the absence of privacy for newlyweds, and the call to subordinate one's personal desires to the welfare of the family.[53] These stressors can breed incredible frustration, yet because frustration is incongruent with the joint family ideal, it tends to be ignored until reaches a crisis—either erupting as inappropriate behavior or becoming manifest through bodily ailments (somatization), which tends to carry less of a stigma than emotional and psychological stress (Weiss et al. 2001: 85). Although these problems are generally identified with the behavior or ailment rather than the underlying emotional factors, everybody clearly knows that something is going on.[54]

In such circumstances, ascetics can help to resolve family conflicts by listening to the differing accounts and advising them how to solve these problems. Ascetic authority is especially important for directing elders on how to behave toward their juniors, for this provides a mechanism—calling on a respected outside authority—through which the latter can circumvent conventional family authority. Yet ascetics' ability to play this role also comes from their reputed magical powers, since in many cases, the real cause of such problems is seen as demonic possession. Attributing the problem to an external agency helps to preserve family harmony by removing blame—the possessed person may be seen as weak, but not as evil. The problem calls for deploying countering powers strong enough to control the afflicting spirits, and in such cases, ascetics can be enormously effective—especially when their social authority and reputed magic powers are combined with careful and perceptive listening.[55] Ascetics are also enormously important to individuals, where their psychological roles as healers and spiritual guides often seem roughly parallel with that of a therapist in the United States.[56] Although there are clear differences between the two, both seek to help people cope with life's problems and also give those lives some sense of purpose. Despite Kakar's unease with the Radha Soami Satsang's psychological subtexts, he reports that for many devotees their devotion to Maharajji had finally brought a sense of peace:

> Almost invariably the individual had gone through one or more experiences that had severely mauled his sense of self-worth, if not

> shattered it completely.... The conviction and sense of a miracle having taken place, though projected to the circumstances that led to the individual's initiation into the cult, actually derived from the "miraculous" ending of a persistent and painful internal state, the disappearance of the black clouds of *udasinta* ["sadness"] that had seemed to be a permanent feature.... (1982: 142)

Of course, Kakar's claims about the "actual" cause of this miracle are his interpretation, but despite his skepticism, a major function that ascetics play is helping people with the problems in living that are all too abundant in modern India.[57] Over the past few generations, social change has caused tremendous dislocation, whereas corruption and population pressures have made it difficult for people—no matter how qualified—to succeed on merit alone. These pressures are only amplified for poor people, for whom the trying circumstances of everyday life—inadequate housing, unemployment, financial worries, health issues, violence, and the erosion of traditional support networks—can generate anxiety, hopelessness, and despair (Patel and Kleinman 2003: 611–12).

Given such intense pressures, it is hardly surprising that many Indians suffer from some form of psychological or behavioral problem—according to one estimate, as many as 58 million (Khandelwal et al. 2004: 133). Among these, there may be 32 million people suffering from clinical depression, although in many cases, people express this through somatic complaints, which are more socially acceptable (Raghuram et al. 2001: 32). These complaints are exacerbated by the circumstances of life in poverty, which does not by itself make people mentally ill (since most poor people are not), but it does heighten risks in specifically gendered ways. All poor people suffer from poor housing and infrastructure, loss of traditional support structures, and the threat of demolition in unsanctioned slums, but men and women respond differently to these pressures. Men's reactions tend to center more around feelings of inadequacy as providers, which may come out in substance abuse, domestic violence, or criminality, whereas women feel the pressures of having to earn for the family, domestic violence, and coping with unfaithful and addicted husbands (Parkar et al. 2003: 296–98). Not only is India's psychiatric infrastructure utterly inadequate—there are only about four thousand psychiatrists in the entire country and an estimated ten thousand patients for every bed in a mental health facility—but also an estimated 75 percent of these patients live outside the urban areas where one typically finds such resources (Khandelwal et al. 2004: 135–37). Furthermore, for many people the cultural divide between their worldview and that of a psychiatric professional is simply too wide to bridge. In

a recent study in Bangalore, patients with clinical depression readily acknowledged somatic complaints (headache, pain) but, under further questioning, acknowledged problems with sadness and depression related to interpersonal problems. Many of these patients were also frustrated because the doctors they had visited had simply prescribed medicines. Raghuram and his colleagues highlight this problem in their conclusion. They note that experiences of illness and ideas about illness are shaped by the assumptions about reality found in a particular cultural context but that "while traditional healing systems and indigenous healers take cognizance of these factors and strive to incorporate them into their therapeutic processes, medical and psychiatric interventions tend to avoid such considerations" (2001: 43).

This conclusion clearly indicates why ascetics could provide effective psychological care: they are established authority figures, they are part of a long tradition of seeking mental and spiritual well-being, and they are working within the cultural context in which a patient's illness has become manifest. In discussing religious healers, Khandelwal and colleagues note that they not only have good rapport with patients and their families, but also are readily available and inexpensive—both significant factors for rural people (2004: 135–36). They further note that these healers mainly work through "psychodynamic principles of suggestion," a process that has proven to be effective for addictions and dissociative disorder (2004: 138).[58] One clear marker of the way that ascetic status embeds cultural expectations for healing can be found in the instructions for psychiatric care of Hindus written by an Indian psychiatrist in New York City. Whereas the usual psychiatric model is to be detached and professional and to work only with the patient, Hindu patients and their families expect that the psychiatrist will listen to the whole family, that "the psychiatrist will be an advisor, teacher, and guidance counselor—almost like a Guru [and therefore] . . . take a more directive role than the traditional nondirective stance of Western psychiatrists" (Juthani 2001:128). Even if the only thing at work is the power of suggestion, the authority invested in ascetics helps them use it effectively. As Amarnath once remarked on one man's problems, and the "treatment" he prescribed:

> He was conducting an inner recitation (*japa*), continually saying "I am miserable, I am miserable," and he repeated this so much that it actually made him so. This is because one eventually attains whatever anyone repeats with a focused mind (e.g., as in the continuous recitation of God's name to attain God). One day I reached my limit, and told him that in other places he could do and think as he liked, but that I would not stand for this in my presence.

It is easy to interpret this as a commentary on the power of positive thinking, but Amarnath reported that the man subsequently became much happier. It is harder to say whether the man's mental state changed because of Amarnath's command or from the improvements in his own circumstances; this was the same man for whom Amarnath had helped to arrange the marriages of his daughter and his son, and one can easily see how removing these burdens would improve his mental state.

The preceding paragraphs have noted certain functional parallels between a guru and a therapist, and as one therapist noted, "We both have the same basic orientation: helping people to get out of suffering" (Vigne n.d.: 11). Kakar notes that the healing device in both psychotherapy and the Radha Soami Satsang is the psychological mechanism known as transference, in which the patient/disciple, suffering from some feelings of deficiency, attains a recharged identity through identification with a powerful and integrated figure, whether guru or therapist.[59] Yet behind this similarity lurk fundamentally different assumptions. According to Kakar, therapy is usually seen as necessary but temporary. The therapist helps the patient regain a sense of equilibrium, after which the patient continues on with life; note that many therapists are now called "coaches" or "life coaches," to convey that sense of facilitating independence. Although certain therapists are undoubtedly more skilled than others, the scientific roots of Western therapy entail greater stress on the method than on the person performing it. These assumptions lie behind Kakar's unease with the Radha Soami Satsang: not only is the psychological transference to the guru permanent but also, in Kakar's judgment, it ultimately seems to make the disciples more dependent, rather than more integrated and independent.[60] Kakar's assumed therapeutic model is very different from the guru-disciple bond, in which years of contact with one's master slowly transform the disciple, removing his or her problems in the process. The heart of this process is a personal interaction, which means that one should choose a teacher only after determining that this teacher can actually help one. In Western-style therapy, any knowledge of the therapist's inner life is seen as incidental, if not actually harmful, but this sort of judgment is the most important factor in choosing a guru.

Since the guru-disciple bond is a relationship between two individuals, each particular bond reflects the circumstances of that particular relationship. In a massive organization such as the Radha Soami Satsang, the enormous crowds make a personal conversation with the master a treasured event for "elite" disciples; this is very different from a guru who has only a few disciples, with whom he (or she) has extended and intimate contact. In either case, one is likely to see competition between disciples for closeness to the guru. This may

be driven by simple ego—the desire for close contact with the master, and to feel valued and singled out—but another potential motive in large organizations is that big gurus can command tremendous resources, to which one can gain access by membership in the inner circle.[61] Even in a big organization, gurus may consistently give devotees good advice. Williams notes that a devotee's time with the Swami Narayan guru is so limited that the devotee must clearly think through the issues involved in order to state the problem concisely (1986: 338). This dynamic is very different in smaller groups, where the extended contact between masters and disciples puts far greater responsibility on the master. On one hand, masters commit to overseeing their disciples' spiritual development, which sometimes involves vowing to oversee a disciple's release from rebirth, no matter how many lifetimes it will take (Lamb 2006: 181). At the same time, they must conduct this task while serving as "the target of all their [the disciples'] emotional projections, much intensified by their devotion as well as the frustrations inherent in the process of the *sadhana*" (spiritual practice) (Vigne n.d.: 15).

Vigne's comments about the guru-disciple relationship are ultimately based on the tradition's highest ideals: his "disciples" are psychologically sound people seeking spiritual advancement, and his guru is a Sadguru—a person who has found God. He admits (p. 10) that a Sadguru is extremely rare, compared with "average gurus who are religious teachers or heads of religious institutions," but this idealized perspective lets him criticize some assumptions of psychotherapy.[62] Yet when those gurus are simply average, this continuing idealization by their disciples can have negative affects on both parties. The guru is subject to a continuing flood of adulation, which because of its pleasant quality is less subject to critical rejection, and after a while, both parties may start to believe what the other is saying—what Kakar describes as an "unconscious collusion" between guru and disciple, which ultimately makes the disciples "more stupid, more infantile and more powerless than they actually are" (1982: 150).

All judgments about "true" and "false" gurus are ultimately subjective, and different people may have widely differing opinions, as I forcefully realized on a Delhi-bound bus. My companion waxed eloquent on the peace he felt in the presence of his guru, whom he described as an enlightened being—all of which is pretty standard disciple commentary. After a while, I realized that his guru was Satpal Maharaj, about whom I had already formed some unfavorable opinions. Satpal is a wealthy and powerful Rajput householder guru, whose father, Hans Maharaj, was a respected religious leader.[63] Satpal's Manav Utthan Seva Samiti ("Committee to Uplift and Serve Humanity") has built *dharamshala*s throughout the Garhwal Himalayas and, to its credit, does considerable

charitable work, particularly in bringing medical care to Himalayan villages. Yet the organization is clearly modeled on a royal court: it stresses service to the ashram and the guru, who is idealized as a divinity, and with whom the general membership has almost no unscripted contact. Satpal also has clear political ambitions, which may be consistent with his Rajput heritage but seem less consistent for a spiritual leader. His campaign message during the 1989 parliamentary election was openly casteist and appealed to "India's high children," that is, to higher caste people—a message that may have played well in the Garhwal hills, where brahmins and Rajputs predominate. He was soundly defeated in that election, as were most Congress candidates, but he was elected to Parliament later in the 1990s, when he did a stint as a Union minister (a minister without portfolio) and has continued to serve there, winning reelection in April 2009.

Whereas my companion extolled his teacher as a realized being and a master who brought him indescribable peace, I saw him as an ambitious and grasping man trying to use his spiritual position for political gain. Such conflicting opinions highlight the individual quality of each guru-disciple relationship. Although I might think that my companion was being duped, my opinions are irrelevant, at least with regard to my companion's experience. It is not for me to judge whether he has truly received something from his teacher. At the same time, it is reasonably certain that I would not benefit from associating with him, nor would anyone expect that I should, and this flexibility for individuals to decide what suits their needs is one of the defining characteristics of Hindu religious life.

Through their roles as gurus and teachers, ascetics can profoundly influence people's lives. One can find charlatans playing these roles for personal gain—although opinions are rarely unanimous here—but this does not diminish the importance of the roles; it means only that they are not being fulfilled properly. When genuine, one finds teachers rendering a multitude of services to their disciples: taking away their troubles, giving advice on all kinds of matters, passing on teaching and cultural values, and providing material help through their influence, presence, or magic powers. These people have been the traditional religious adepts in Hindu society, and they are still the guardians of its culture. Some of them influence people on a purely personal level, whereas others have built wealthy and successful religious institutions. Their continuing influence and constructive presence—in *akhara*s, ashrams, and institutions and as transient and resident individuals—are a a major part of why Hardwar still retains a genuine sense of power and holiness.

7

Pilgrims and Visitors

The previous chapters have discussed the roles and activities of three different local interest groups—businesspeople, *panda*s, and ascetics—who have all played important roles in shaping and defining modern Hardwar. The time has come to take a closer look at their customers, who contract for the tangible and intangible goods the residents provide. At the most basic level, these visitors are necessary for Hardwar's economic viability, but their continuing faith in its holiness is also one of the forces keeping Hardwar spiritually vibrant. These visitors are as diverse as those who serve them, and to simply call them "pilgrims" masks the sharp differences in who they are, what they do, and their divergent understandings of their own journeys. A closer look at the pilgrims quickly reveals just how much they differ from one another, and this diversity leads me to doubt that any single model can explain them all.

Such multiple meanings are an established feature of the Hindu tradition, as the Sanskrit pilgrimage literature clearly shows. On one hand, the *sthalamahatmya*s (texts written to glorify a particular place) fulsomely praise their chosen spot's holiness and stress the immense religious merit generated by ritual actions there. This perspective ultimately stems from the sacrificial worldview in the Vedic scriptures known as the Brahmanas, in which correctly performed rituals brought guaranteed results.[1] On the other hand, the pilgrimage literature also emphasizes the importance of cultivating certain attitudes and dispositions. This latter emphasis contrasts

sharply with the former, since it is affective, not behavioral. In this latter view, the pilgrimage journey was a vehicle for inner transformation, for which one's careful performance was an outward symbol. Properly performed rites were important, but even more important was one's mental attitude while performing them:

> The rewards ... are the fruits not of the toilsome marches and immersions in sacred streams and of the austere life lived in the course of the journey, but of the high ethical ideals cultivated and sustained by the pilgrim.... There is no automatic spiritual reaction to a mechanical act or rite in a universe dominated by moral law. Spiritual ascent is the fruit of a righteous life. (Aiyengar 1942: xxx)

Such conflicting messages reveal clear differences about how to understand pilgrimage even from people within the Hindu tradition. These texts have only limited utility for interpreting modern pilgrimage, for several important reasons: they reflect a worldview from many centuries ago, they were intended to be prescriptive rather than descriptive, and they were probably known only to a small, educated elite, although that elite may well have disseminated them orally. At the same time, these texts not only seem to reflect stable cultural concerns—since modern pilgrimage shows these same contrasting tendencies—but also caution observers from assuming that any single model can explain all cases.

The same caution holds true for scholarly theoretical models, which have ultimately proved less universal than their authors had hoped. The best known theory is that of Victor Turner, who compares pilgrimage to tribal rites of passage and claims that both have the same three elements: leaving behind the structures and patterns of everyday life; a period of separation or "liminality," which he claims is marked by spontaneous community (*communitas*) in which social boundaries are erased; and finally the transformed initiates' return to normal society. Aside from theoretical objections—Turner never establishes that initiation is an appropriate analogue for pilgrimage—he also seems to have quoted his data selectively, and recent studies have belied his claim about *communitas* (Morinis 1984: 257–58). All of these problems compromise his model's utility.

S. M. Bhardwaj's *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India* gives another model for Indian pilgrimage sites—a descriptive typology, from a cultural geographer's perspective. Bhardwaj describes pilgrimage places as falling into five levels, from subregional to Pan-Hindu; his primary criterion for determining a place's level is the distance that pilgrims travel to get there. This work carefully locates pilgrimage sites described in various Sanskrit texts and measures and

monitors pilgrim flow between them. His trouble comes when he tries to determine the relative sanctity of pilgrimage spots and from his claim that as pilgrims move to higher level sites, their goals are less tied to immediate concrete needs. Determining the levels turns out to be a subjective process with multiple exceptions, whereas the claim that higher level sites draw people with more abstract goals is contradicted by other studies (Morinis 1984: 271; van der Veer 1989: 62).

In *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, Alan Morinis gives the most careful critique of these and other models and demonstrates how just about every theory purporting to explain pilgrimage—such as claiming that it promotes social integration, enacts the social order, reflects individual motives, or fulfills psychological needs—is either fraught with inconsistencies, ignores contrary data, or is so tied to one particular context that it is useless in any other. After this tour de force, the book's final chapter promotes his own theory—in which the pilgrim's "explicit" journey to a shrine is simultaneously mirrored by an "implicit" journey of the soul to the One—which later writers have effectively critiqued and deconstructed.[2]

The problem with big theories is that any theory broad enough to cover every instance probably can't tell much about any particular case, and this raises doubts that any single model can explain all cases. So to interpret particular cases meaningfully, it seems that one's approach must be contextual and particular. The most frequently invoked supporters for this claim are British anthropologists John Eade and Michael Sallnow, who stress examining pilgrimage in light of its social context and "historically and culturally specific behaviors and meanings" (1991: 5, cited in Badone and Roseman 2004: 4.) According to Eade and Sallnow, pilgrimage is an arena for competing secular and religious discourses, in which multiple understandings may simultaneously contest for recognition (1991: 2–4, cited in Swatos 2002: 96).

This understanding implies that pilgrimage is a polysemous way of acting (Voye 2002: 115)—that it contains multiple meanings and cannot be rendered intelligible by any single explanation—and this assumption directs one's attention to the particular forces at work in each case.[3] These forces must include both social and individual factors: as a social phenomenon, pilgrimage is undoubtedly shaped by the larger society, but it is ultimately individuals who decide to go on pilgrimage. As Morinis notes, pilgrimage is based on "the voluntary acts of individuals, pursuing culturally defined patterns of action for reasons of personal profit" (1984: 252).

Several recent works carefully investigate Indian social context as a way to understand what Hindu pilgrimage is "about." In *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*, cultural geographer Alan Morinis documents pilgrimage at three sites in

West Bengal and then uses this data to critique existing theoretical models, as mentioned earlier. Peter van der Veer's *Gods on Earth* looks at the "the management of religious experience and identity"—the book's subtitle—in the city of Ayodhya. This interest leads him to focus on Ayodhya's religious specialists—ascetics and *panda*s—and on how these groups and their interests have shaped that place. His research time coincided with the genesis of the Ram Janam Bhumi movement, and this event may well have sparked his interest in how interest groups manage religious meaning. Yet this approach gives little attention to the pilgrims themselves—as if denying them judgment and agency in this process.[4] Finally, William Sax's *Mountain Goddess* carefully interprets pilgrimages connected with the Himalayan goddess Nanda Devi and demonstrates how they reflect and reinforce Kumaoni society's underlying social forces, particularly with regard to gender. Yet one reviewer notes that although Sax's analysis is convincing, it is emphatically local—that is, there is very little consideration about any other Hindu pilgrimages, and so "it is hard to say what elements . . . might be applicable in other contexts even in South Asia" (Llewellyn 1998: 254, 256).

On the other side, there has been considerable emphasis on investigating individual motives. Fifty years ago, Diehl described South Indian pilgrimage as "a means to an end" done for pragmatic reasons: "Something is wrong, or some danger is threatening, or some good things, highly desired, are missing. Again there are other motives for going on pilgrimage originating in a general atmosphere of piety and devotion and communal and social loyalty. But very often the tour to the holy place is undertaken with a definite objective in view" (1956: 250, 255). In *Fruitful Journeys*, Ann Gold recorded and interpreted Rajasthani villagers' pilgrim journeys.[5] As did Diehl, Gold organized her material according to the traveler's purpose: local shrines were for physical and psychic healing and to placate the spirits of the unquiet dead, whereas a trip to Hardwar to perform *asthivisarjana* (immersing the bones from a cremation pyre in the Ganges) fulfilled "bio-moral duty." Yet she has more trouble finding a clear motive for her third major pilgrimage type, an extended bus tour to various North Indian crossing places (*tirtha*s) and admits that for these the rationale was "far less penetrable" (1989: 260). In the end, she does not characterize this last type of pilgrim journey as motivated by the desire for merit—since most pilgrims professed doubts about acquiring this—but as "sweeping the road ahead," performing actions to prepare for liberation in the far distant future.

Both studies are commendable for stressing individual decisions, yet their focus on motive inevitably influences them. Since Diehl's work is titled *Instrument and Purpose* and his discussion of pilgrimage comes in a section looking at remedies for "unforeseen crises," it seems pretty clear that he considers

pilgrimage an instrumental rite—performed either to attain something or to alleviate some distress. Yet many of my interactions with Hardwar pilgrims revealed no such overt motives, which means either that one must deny that these people were on pilgrimage or that one must rethink this stress on motives. Ann Gold richly documents that people in the village she calls Ghatiyali travel for different reasons, but her emphasis on purpose shapes how she presents her material. She divides her accounts based on the pilgrims' purposes and their destinations, but both parameters seem more fluid in reality than as presented in her text.[6] Such a rigidly defined model does not recognize either that a single journey can have multiple ends—as her own descriptions reveal—or that a single pilgrimage site could be the destination for all three types of journey. A subtler problem comes from her focus on motive itself, which T. N. Madan describes as revealing her "rootedness in her own culture, with its concept of 'goal-oriented' and 'rational' action" (1989: 231). Perhaps her search for a motive leads her to center the worth of "wandering" pilgrimage in "using financial resources in a way that is qualitatively different from anything possible in the village" (1989: 291). Expenditure is easy to observe and measure, but it seems misplaced to fix the locus of meaning there, since it ignores affective differences; one can easily envision two people doing the same thing but for very different reasons. This also ignores that different groups of people may do very different sorts of things in the same place, based on their social and religious identity.[7]

To give an accurate account of modern pilgrimage in Hardwar, one must see both the site and its pilgrims as clearly and realistically as possible. Although Hardwar has its saints and holy men, it also has the thieves, cheats, and frauds one finds in any transient town. Pilgrims are generally aware of this, and one woman succinctly summarized the dangers by stating "there are as many pickpockets as pilgrimage places"—that is, there are immense numbers of each! Caution was also reserved for shopkeepers, whom one pilgrim group characterized as the biggest thieves of all, and for ascetics in general, who were described as merely "showing off" but having no real attainment. Such caution partly stems from travelers' natural wariness in any strange place, far from their homes and resources. This understandable wariness is further heightened by the continual warnings—both verbal admonitions from well-meaning local people and on the signs and billboards all through the town.[8]

If Hardwar's atmosphere is different from what one might expect of a "holy place," the same is true for the "pilgrims." Hardwar's seasonal traffic and regional visitation patterns clearly show that religious motives are not the only thing bringing people to Hardwar.[9] Recognizable vacation patterns—day-trippers from Delhi and Dehra Dun during the cool season and weekend traffic

from Delhi during the monsoon—bear clear witness that not every visitor is motivated solely by burning piety, nor are they invariably moral exemplars. In 1990, when the lodging house in which we lived served the low end of the market—because the rooms were very basic—our landlord professed displeasure that financial difficulties had compelled him to take in lodgers, and his wife consistently referred to the pilgrims as "dirty people." This was partly a commentary on their personal habits—vacated rooms usually got their initial cleaning by being sprayed with a hose—but it also had a moral dimension. Both landlord and landlady repeatedly warned us not to trust "those" people and never to leave our things unattended or our room unlocked. My wife and I never lost anything substantial, although when visitors started using our buckets of water—which took a long time to fill in the hot season—we began storing them in our bedroom.

These were petty annoyances committed by law-abiding people, but a pilgrim town's crowds and anonymity provide opportunities for more serious crimes. Festivals have a long history of attracting thieves and bad characters who use the crowds and confusion to their advantage, and a century ago, the British authorities regularly posted Punjabi detectives at the Kumbha Mela to apprehend any known criminals coming from that region (HMI Jan. 1892: 41; Sept. 1903: 14). These sorts of things still happen, and in 1990, I witnessed a Bengali "mill owner" play an extended but ultimately unsuccessful con game with Baba Amarnath.[10] Just as one must be wary of Hardwar's residents, so must one carefully screen its visitors.

Recognizing individual differences shifts the focus back to individuals, and rather than positing some single factor attracting every pilgrim—or even that visitors have clearly formed motives at all—it seems appropriate to start with the basic fact that pilgrims do come, and come regularly. When one looks more closely, one sees that pilgrims have as many reasons for coming as the residents have for hosting them. They also have widely differing levels of piety, education, and religious sophistication: some are sincerely devout; others come because of family pressure, habit, or because it generates feelings of well-being; and people increasingly come for aesthetic reasons, such as seeking some quiet time in a pastoral setting. These affective differences make it problematic to say anything about "pilgrims" as a whole. Yet although each person comes for individual reasons, pilgrim actions gain meaning within the larger social and religious context. So even though pilgrims come for their own reasons, and the same action can have different meanings for different people, at the same time Hardwar's social and religious context has generated some relatively stable visitation patterns. Naming these patterns has a certain arbitrary quality, but it seems evident that all the visitors will interact with at least one of the groups

mentioned in the previous chapters—businessmen, *panda*s, and ascetics—and that these interactions will have a hand in shaping these categories.

The following sections first examine three general factors attracting pilgrims to Hardwar: to make contact with Hardwar's resident powers (human or divine), to perform life-cycle rites, and to seek Hardwar's tangible and intangible "virtues." The first two reasons are more specific, with the latter clearly connected to Hardwar's *panda*s, whereas the third is deliberately broader and admits a wider variety of possibilities. The two following sections examine two other sorts of pilgrim journeys: the *kanvar* pilgrimage, in which the pilgrims transport Ganges water from Hardwar to an end point somewhere else, and the pilgrim's journey through "god's door" (*hari-dvar*) into the Himalayas. Both of these latter journeys show Hardwar's connection to other sacred sites—in the former, it is the center from which pilgrims radiate, and in the latter the portal through which they pass—and they also illuminate the variety of motives behind people's journeys and the diverse ways in which people understand the same journey. Examining these specific journeys will throw the larger issues and forces affecting Hindu pilgrimage into sharper focus, and these will be examined at greater length in the conclusion.

Resident Powers

One of Hardwar's consistent attractions is its resident powers (human as well as divine), from whom devotees seek relief from troubles, help in distress, or the fulfillment of some desire. Whereas Semitic religious traditions insist on the otherness of God and a sharp ontological distinction between Creator and creatures, for Hindus these boundaries are far more fluid. As discussed in the previous chapter, ascetics who are deemed to have gained some spiritual realization are often believed to have superhuman powers, which they can direct to bring benefit to others, and in many cases, devotees worship their guru as a deity. Whether enshrined as an image in a temple or embodied in human form, these powerful divinities are believed to be able to wield the same sorts of powers. In both cases, this power is not inherent in Hardwar itself, but in a being who has chosen to reside there, although human beings are admittedly more mobile than the gods.

This distinction between power and place is clearly visible with regard to Hardwar's resident deities, who are said to grant the requests of the faithful and whose temples are sources of independent power. One example is Bilvakeshvar, where according to tradition, Shiva first revealed himself to Parvati, in the "self-manifested" (*svayambhu*) *linga* that is Bilvakeshvar's primary image.[11] As

mentioned earlier, a *svayambhu linga* is much more powerful than any ordinary image, because it is Shiva revealing himself out of grace for his devotees; not only does the image need no rite to consecrate it but also at such places Shiva is always present and responsive to his devotees' needs. Contemporary pamphlet literature and Bilvakeshvar's resident ascetics both claim that Bilvakeshvar is a *siddhapith*, a place at which divine favors are readily accessible, and both sources stress that this is a place where one's desires can be fulfilled.[12]

A more prominent local example is Mansa Devi, whose persona as a wish-granting goddess is evident in her name (Mansa), a word usually glossed as "desire." As one might expect, her liberality gets heavily stressed by anyone with any economic interest in the temple, from the beggars lining the path to town—who call out "May your journey be fruitful, may your desire be fulfilled"—all the way to the *sanyasi*s who manage the temple trust. Mansa's power is well known among local people in Hardwar and seems particularly connected with the difficulties of everyday life, especially fertility issues; our landlord's mother assured my wife that we would soon be blessed with a son if we offered a shawl to Mansa Devi, and then she listed several women who had been so blessed.

As at most wish-granting shrines, one finds people coming for various reasons: to ask for favors from the goddess, to give public witness and thanksgiving for benefits received (which is considered essential, and omitting it risks incurring Mansa's wrath), and to maintain an ongoing relationship with the goddess. Many people also make the trip to Mansa Devi as a pleasant outing or as part of the circuit of Hardwar's religious attractions. The temple is perched on a hilltop directly behind Har-ki-Pairi, and this scenic and highly visible location helps to generate considerable traffic. Obviously, one visit can combine several of these aspects, as with the middle-aged Harayanvi couple I saw dispensing sweets in spring 1990. Upon being asked why they were doing this, the husband informed me that the goddess had granted their wish—he did not reveal what this wish was—and that they were distributing sweets to show their gratitude. In the course of a much longer conversation, he told me that he and his wife were devotees of Mansa Devi and that they tried to visit her several times a year.

The Mansa Devi temple is also a spectacular example of successful marketing and development. Visitor traffic there is probably surpassed only by Har-ki-Pairi, even though the temple was built in the twentieth century and its presiding local deity lacks a strong charter myth connecting her to the larger pantheon.[13] What it does have is a highly visible location, and this has been skillfully exploited by the trust's managers, the Niranjani Akhara. On one hand, the trust has steadily improved access to the temple, first by constructing a concrete staircase from Hardwar's bazaar, and later by building a cable car (inaugurated in 1984), which

removed the need for any exertion, as well as providing a touristic thrill. The management has also tried to make the site a pleasant spot to visit. It was piped for running water during the 1974 Kumbha Mela, and this made possible not only basic amenities, such as bathrooms and restaurants, but also aesthetic attractions, such as gardens and plantings (Bharati 1988: 29).

At the conceptual level, the temple management has skillfully deployed mythic images to reinforce Mansa Devi's sanctity. As a strategy to counter the temple's relatively recent construction, Mansa Devi's *mahatmya* associates her with better known local and regional goddesses. Locally, the *mahatmya* describes the temples of Maya Devi, Chandi Devi, and Mansa Devi as the three corners of the triangular (*trikon*) symbol of the primordial Mother Goddess (who is seen as the ultimate source of any individual goddess). This not only turns Hardwar's geography into a symbol for the goddess but also makes Mansa Devi an essential part of this symbol. Regionally, she is associated with other famous Shiwalik goddesses, particularly Vaishno Devi. Local pamphlets portray Mansa Devi as a member of this "family" of goddesses (Caturvedi, n.d. A), and the temple reinforces this association with a pilgrim rest hall specifically devoted to Vaishno Devi, which was built in the mid-1980s.

As described in chapter 6, people come to ascetics for the same sorts of reasons they come to the gods—in both cases, they are approaching a being they believe has the power to resolve their problems. These people may be coming to visit in the context of an established relationship, or they may be attempting to initiate one. They may also take a Ganges bath and see local sights while they are in town, but their primary purpose is not to tour Hardwar, but rather to meet with a particular person in Hardwar.[14] Both deities and ascetics are thus valuable resources to be invoked in time of need—potential sources of power and aid to be included in the attempt to marshal every possible resource. It is common knowledge that life in modern India can be very difficult, and if anything, it is becoming more so. An exploding population means relentless competition for every available opportunity, and when this is combined with nepotism and corruption, even educated and qualified people can find it difficult to succeed. If nothing else, calling on such resources gives people some sense of empowerment, a feeling that they are not completely helpless in the face of life's rushing tides.[15]

Life-Cycle Concerns

Aside from petitioning Hardwar's resident powers, another consistent motive bringing people to Hardwar is to perform life-cycle rites, primarily the tonsure

ceremony marking an infant's first haircut (*mundan*), sacred thread (*janeu*), and death rites. These are all *samskaras* (religiously mandated rites of passage), but they also carry an undercurrent of familial and/or moral obligation: people come for *mundan* or *janeu* to uphold family custom or to fulfill a vow, whereas with the death rites, one finds both long-standing family patterns and cultural conventions for coping with death and bereavement. The end result is that people come to Hardwar and perform these "required" religious acts for many different reasons.

Certain families customarily perform the tonsure and sacred thread ceremonies in Hardwar, even though these rites can be performed anywhere. Both ceremonies mark important transitions in a young person's life, and one reason to perform them in Hardwar is the notion that its holiness can give these rites an extra positive charge—both to ensure their success and to lessen the time needed to perform them.[16] The tonsure ceremony removes residual impurities from childbirth and marks the end of infancy; it usually occurs sometime near the child's first birthday, although the precise time is often set by family tradition.[17] The child's head is completely shaved, and the shorn hair carefully collected and disposed of, since people believe it is so charged with the child's essence that it can be used to perform black magic on the child. One probable reason that Hardwar is a popular site for this rite is that the Ganges is an ideal place in which to safely dispose of this highly charged hair.[18]

The sacred thread ceremony, often described as a second birth, is an adolescent rite of passage for "twice-born" (i.e., brahmin, Ksatriya, and Vaishya) Hindu boys. It confers on them the religious entitlement to study the Veda and marks their transition to being religiously responsible agents.[19] The time for performing this ceremony is far more flexible and dependent on family circumstances (including financial circumstances) than the tonsure ceremony and may not be performed until a boy is in his late teens.[20] For both rituals, the ceremony's arrangements and complexity are determined by family custom, inclination, and financial position. Many are simple affairs, but occasionally people celebrate more conspicuously, such as the extended family I saw processing toward Har-ki-Pairi one day in 1989, escorted by a full brass band.[21] Lavish expenditures on these rites can also be status displays—with a reception and banquet for hundreds of guests—to make explicit or implicit claims about the family's wealth and community status. One *panda* friend reported spending forty thousand rupees for his infant son's tonsure, and another an equivalent sum for his son's sacred thread ceremony—both significant expenditures for men who are financially comfortable but by no means wealthy.

Both of these rites are auspicious occasions, although the tonsure ceremony's shorn hair also generates ritual impurity. The same cannot be said for the

death rites—Hardwar's other major life-cycle attraction—which at their worst are both highly inauspicious and violently impure, although these qualities vary from rite to rite, as discussed in chapter 5. The most benign rite is *pindadan*, a commemorative ceremony in which the performer symbolically feeds his ancestors with flour balls and water. This is a "required" rite in the pilgrimage literature—regardless of whether one has recently had a death in the family—and many pilgrims perform this. Hardwar's center for this rite is Kushavarta Ghat, and has been so for at least two centuries, since chapter 11 of the *Mayapurimahatmya* lists the benefits from performing these rites there.[22] Kushavarta's notice boards exhort visitors to be sure that they are transacting with their "genuine" *panda* (thus protecting the group's hereditary rights) and also inform pilgrims that the Ganga Sabha has a branch office at Kushavarta to assist them—potentially important for a rite that pilgrims could decide to perform on the spur of the moment.

The most virulent impurity arises from the death rites involving actual corpses. As discussed in chapter 5, the *panda*s themselves distinguish between "incomplete death" (*kacca maran*) and "complete death (*pakka maran*). *Kacca maran* refers to the rites immediately after death, in which the dead body generates violent impurity. These rites are part of the standard process for handling a death but are generally performed in Hardwar only for locals (or other people who happen to die there). *Pakka maran* refers to *asthivisarjana*, "casting the bones" and ash from a cremation pyre into the Ganges, and Hardwar is a major center for this rite, drawing people from all the surrounding regions: Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat (Figure 7.1). This practice is very old—the first reference comes from Hsuan Tsang (see chapter 3, note 2)—and its mythic charter is the Descent of the Ganges, in which a primary theme is duty to one's ancestors. The *purana*s do not associate this story with Hardwar, but this had happened by the early 1600s, and Hardwar's importance as a location for this rite is undoubtedly one of the reasons that the Descent of the Ganges is now identified as Hardwar's charter myth.[23]

Asthivisarjana is completely different from the rituals immediately after death; it is removed from the intense pollution of recent death, and has no required timetable to perform it. People formerly performed it as an adjunct part of their regular pilgrimage behavior, and a family might keep the remains for months or even years before someone took them to Hardwar. This traditional association with pilgrimage behavior is undoubtedly why the *panda*s still preside over these rites, even though modern transportation has made it much more common for the ritual to be carried out soon after death, sometimes even before the eleventh day rites have been performed.[24]



FIGURE 7.1. Pilgrim carrying "flowers," the euphemism for bits of ash and bone from a near relative's cremation pyre. He has brought these remains to Hardwar to perform the final rite for the dead, *asthivisarjana*, in which the remains will be immersed in the Ganges.

Since death is one of life's few certainties, one can easily see why performing these rites would be important for the pilgrims. Funeral customs tend to be conservative in any culture in that they provide the cultural patterns to help survivors move through their sorrow to acceptance. Immersing a person's remains in the Ganges is a powerful symbol of closure, even if this is done before the tenth day rite of *sapindikarana*. Performing *asthivisarjana* in Hardwar has also become a tradition in many families, and thus performing it becomes important to survivors, regardless of whether they believe the metaphysical claims associated with it. As with any ritual, one sees sharp differences in how individuals perform this: many people seem deeply reverent, but I observed one man literally flipping the ashes into the Ganges. Yet whatever people's affective states—whether believing or disbelieving religious claims, or

performing it reverently or flippantly—the desire to perform this ritual is one consistent factor drawing people to Hardwar, and the stability of death rites makes it likely that this will continue. This provides the *panda*s with a guaranteed income but brings with it undesirable consequences from earning so much of their income from the dead—"eating them," in local parlance—as described in fuller detail in chapter 5.

On the whole, pilgrims have ambivalent feelings toward their *panda*s. Some people reported visiting their *panda* every time they came to Hardwar, whereas others—particularly regular visitors—confessed that they did so only when they had some particular need. On one hand, pilgrims know that this hereditary bond has certain benefits, particularly when they need the *panda*s' services, since the *panda*s will make the necessary arrangements. Yet calling on this relationship means that pilgrims must pay the price, since this is the *panda*s' livelihood. Although pilgrims readily acknowledge that *panda*s are entitled to an appropriate fee for their services, there are often sharp differences in what the parties consider appropriate, and any transaction can involve animated bargaining. The *panda*s' control over the life-cycle ceremonies means that pilgrims desiring to perform these rites will have to negotiate with them, yet the *panda*s' only leverage is what they can persuade people to give them—ideally, "with happy heart." In the end, an amicable agreement is in everyone's interest, yet the adversarial quality of that bargaining period—and a *panda*'s understandable desire to maximize his earnings—can negatively affect pilgrims' attitudes.

Hardwar's Virtues

The aforementioned categories lay out specific reasons bringing people to Hardwar—either to make contact with powers that happen to reside there or to fulfill certain familial or customary obligations. Yet many people's motives for their journey are far less clear. They come seeking what I will call Hardwar's "virtues," interconnected beneficent qualities. One could even claim, as hinted earlier, that these "virtues" underlie the two preceding categories, for why do ascetics choose to settle in Hardwar, and why has it become a center for life-cycle rites, if not from some conviction that it has special virtues? This particular section takes a look at some of these qualities and the ways in which they continue to draw pilgrims, even today.

The assumption behind all of these virtues is that Hardwar is a *tirtha*, a "crossing-place" giving one easier access to the divine, and that its holiness makes it a place where religious merit is more readily and bountifully obtained.

One person remarked that any ritual action in Hardwar equaled ten million such actions in an ordinary place; another more subtly compared the working of a *tirtha* to that of a microphone: that just as a microphone magnifies any sound, in the same way a *tirtha*'s power magnifies the good or evil consequences of any action.

In specific terms, the source of Hardwar's virtues is the Ganges, and throughout its history, Hardwar's central religious importance has been as a bathing place.[25] Hindu reverence for the Ganges is so well known and so highly celebrated that it seems needless to belabor this. The Ganges is, in fact, a deity, and many pilgrims assured me that although it appeared to be water, it was not mere water. This conviction is reinforced by the symbolism in Hardwar's evening *arati*, in which the *pujari*s illuminate both her silver iconic image and her liquid aniconic form.

Convictions about the Ganges and her power are embedded in the text of the Ganga *arati*, which is sung at her worship every morning and evening:

> Om, victory to Mother Ganges, victory to the auspicious Mother Ganges! The man who meditates upon you attains his heart's desire /1/ Om, victory to Mother Ganges! (Repeated as a refrain).
>
> Your waters are pure and silver as moonlight, the one who goes to you for refuge crosses over to the other side /2/ (Refrain)
>
> The whole world knows [how you] redeemed Sagar's sons, O mother, your compassionate glance brings happiness to the three worlds /3/ (Refrain)
>
> One who comes to you for refuge, even on only one occasion, loses the fear of Death, and obtains the highest goal /4/ (Refrain)
>
> O Mother, the devotee who always sings your *arati* will spontaneously obtain liberation /5/ (Refrain).

This text is broadcast over loudspeakers during the *arati* ceremony, chanted by *panda*s while performing Ganga *puja*, and memorized by many visitors. As a widely known and readily accessible text, it is also worth exploring to uncover what it reveals about the power of the Ganges. Verses 1, 2, and 5 promise final liberation, the ultimate Hindu religious goal, and verse 3's mythic reference to saving Sagar's sons highlights her power to accomplish this. Yet the *arati* also stresses this-worldly benefits, both material and psychological: the first verse promises attaining one's heart's desire, whatever that may be, whereas verses 3 and 4 describe her as bringing happiness and taking away the fear of death, both affective states that would clearly improve a person's quality of life. In summary, the *arati* highlights the Ganga's ability to bring both "enjoyment"

(*bhukti*) and final liberation (*mukti*), that is, benefits in the here-and-now, as well as the highest goal.

Although for Hindus the Ganges has inexhaustible virtues, certain themes are so common that they seem bound up with her identity. One is the image of the Ganges as Mother—her most common epithet is Ganga Ma ("Mother Ganges")—bringing with it all the images and associations that Hindu culture invests in motherhood. In describing these, Sudhir Kakar first stresses a mother's accessibility, and second, her constant care:

> From the moment of birth . . . the Indian infant is greeted and surrounded by direct, sensual body contact, by relentless physical ministrations. The emotional quality of nurturing in traditional Indian families serves to amplify the effects of physical gratification. An Indian mother is inclined towards a total indulgence of her infant's wishes and demands, whether these be related to feeding, cleaning, sleeping or being kept company. (1989: 81)

One finds both of these qualities associated with the Ganges. Her material form is constantly accessible and gives devotees direct physical contact with divinity. She refuses no one and asks for nothing, which led one man to describe her as the best temple in Hardwar. She is also renowned as a giver, providing freely to all who come to her. One of the most delightful people I met during my initial fieldwork in 1989–90 was B. D. Bhatia, a retired government official whom I often saw sitting by the banks of the Ganges. Although we talked about many things, his favorite subject was the Ganges, about whom he spoke with genuine, spontaneous joy:

> My dear boy [as he habitually addressed me], this river appears to be water, but you must not think that this is so. This is Mother Ganges, who gives us everything—she gives me my pension [he always mentioned his pension first of all], she gives food and clothing, and sons to the mothers who want them so badly, and good husbands to all the young girls.

Furthermore, he repeatedly stressed that such giving was not done through any sort of formal asking and receiving, but "automatically," through spontaneous participation in the divine economy.

Various rationalizations can explain how this image has been formed. On the simplest level, water is life, and in a land where rainfall is heavily seasonal, one can easily see why rivers are important. For the people dwelling in the Ganges basin, the Ganges not only provides water for their immediate personal needs but also brings life to the earth, growing the food that sustains them.

A more abstract explanation came from a Calcutta executive, who tried to convince me that Hindu river worship stemmed from the fact that the rivers' annual flood brought alluvial soil to enrich the land. Both explanations point to the Ganges as a giver and are reasonable explanations of why it would be important to people, but they are hardly sufficient to explain Hindu reverence for the Ganges. On the contrary, they seem much more like after-the-fact explanations coined to support an existing belief. After all, people around the world appreciate the benefits brought by their rivers, but not many consider these rivers to be divine.

Aside from being the ideal giver, the Ganges is also the quintessentially pure substance and the supreme purifying agent. To bathe in its waters—and thus come into contact with a deity—is to become pure, as the Ganges is pure. This purity is ritual purity—the absence or removal of polluting defilement—and has its source in the mythology and ritual associations of the holy river, which flows to earth from heaven via Shiva's head.[26] Yet one often finds this notion of ritual purity rephrased in ways that clearly reflect the influence of modern science, such as the assertion either that Ganges water is bacteriologically sterile or that it has germicidal properties—in other words, that it is pure or purifying based on a very different set of standards.

The most commonly cited evidence for this purity is the claim that a sealed vessel of Ganges water never goes bad, even after years in storage—a claim I heard from a wide spectrum of people, including a young woman accepted for graduate work at Cambridge University. Here, too, one gets "reasonable" explanations, based either on speculation about dissolved minerals in the water (the graduate student's explanation) or on the theory that since the Ganges originates in the high Himalayas, there is little organic matter to pollute it.[27] People sometimes support such claims by citing scientific studies that have proved either that the Ganges was completely free of bacteria or that it had actual germicidal powers. One contemporary pamphlet even claims that Hardwar's doctors use Ganges water in lieu of distilled water, since it not only kills bacteria and restores the patient to health in six hours but also cures many other ailments.[28]

Such scientific claims were never supported by specific references, nor did I expect this, since it is clearly misplaced to conceive of the Ganga's purity in material terms. At the very least, British sanitary reports from the late nineteenth century show that the cholera bacillus could not only survive in the Ganges but also infect people bathing there. These assertions about the Ganga's purity are phrased in a scientific idiom, but they are not scientific arguments, for their truth or falsity is not open to investigation. They are statements of faith about the nature and workings of the Ganges, presented in the language of infection and sterility rather than the language of ritual purity and pollution.

This widespread belief that the Ganges is both pure and purifying is always coupled with the notion that one must respect it. As Dilip Kumar Roy relates, "A poor pilgrim in Hardwar ... once admonished me when, inadvertently, I had spat into the Ganga while bathing. 'You, a *pilgrim*, must *never* spit into the Ganga,' he said. 'For, others may deny, but you must accept that the Ganga *is* a Devi, a Divine Mother'" (Quoted in Mehta 1970: 83, emphasis original). The issue here is not the power of the Ganges, but the reverence with which one treats it—reverence due to a deity in material form. This perspective stresses an affective attitude rather than the powers inherent in the Ganges itself; both themes not only appear repeatedly in Sanskrit pilgrimage texts but also are important ideas for modern pilgrims.

Though always present, the Ganga's power and purifying capacity fluctuate with time. Just as certain places are deemed holier than others, even so a particular time can be charged with auspicious or inauspicious qualities. Large crowds gather on auspicious occasions, whether for fixed festivals such as Baisakhi, Ganga Dashahara, Kartik Purnima, and Makara Sankranti or wildcard festivals such as a Somavati Amavasya—which in June 2005, drew an estimated 4 million bathers in a single day. Whatever the occasion, people's ritual actions are relatively constant: a Ganges bath for purification and giving alms (*dan*) to generate merit and transfer inauspiciousness. Visitors for such festivals rarely stay long, but usually leave after the propitious moment—a pattern most evident in winter, when pilgrim crowds can evaporate in a single day.[29]

The most heightened time of all is the Kumbha Mela, when the superlatives about Hardwar's holiness run wild, along with the price of hotel rooms. The Kumbha Mela is a fascinating socioreligious phenomenon—a months-long religious festival that takes place in four venerable pilgrimage sites (Hardwar, Prayag, Ujjain, and Nasik). It rotates between these places over a twelve-year cycle determined by astrological conjunctions, and each one draws tens of millions of pilgrims.[30] Claims that the Kumbha Mela dates from hoary antiquity—a clear strategy to reinforce its sanctity—cannot be upheld by the available data. Hardwar seems to be the oldest and original Kumbha Mela site—attested as early as the seventeenth century—but it seems clear that the current festival pattern dates only from the nineteenth century and that the current charter myth was probably composed in the twentieth century (Lochtefeld 2004: 104–9).

Such academic quibbling has little effect on popular practice, and attendance at Hardwar Kumbha Melas increased steadily during the twentieth century—partly because of improved transportation and also because the Mela itself became a more important destination. Although local people do not sharply distinguish between Half and Full Kumbha Melas—calling them both "Kumbh"—full Melas draw considerably larger crowds.[31] At the climactic

moment, according to the festival's mythic charter, the waters of Brahmakund are transformed into *amrta*, the nectar of immortality. The bathing times closest to that moment are reserved for the ascetic *akhara*s, led by the Niranjani Akhara, but there are many other opportunities before and after that moment.[32] The festival's long duration means that people bathing at any moment can be sure that it is a ritually heightened time.

At inauspicious times, people come to Hardwar for protection. One such moment is an eclipse of the sun or moon, when ritual activity serves to counteract an extremely inauspicious event.[33] As one man explained, at most other times, there was some mixture of auspicious and inauspicious influence, but eclipses were wholly inauspicious; people responded to this by bathing and giving alms to counter this influence. As Raheja notes (1988: 48), inauspiciousness cannot be destroyed, only transferred, usually through the medium of gifts, and during the only eclipse I witnessed in Hardwar, I saw groups of beggars soliciting *grahan dan* ("eclipse alms"), who were seeking to take advantage of this unusual earning opportunity.

The last of Hardwar's virtues, and by far the most general, is the quality of "peace" (*shant*) that many visitors reported finding there. In many cases, this peace was of the most mundane sort—that Hardwar's small-town ambiance and pastoral setting provide a gentler environment than India's large metropolitan centers, which are increasingly dangerous, polluted, and unmanageable. This is the lure of the small town, offering refuge and a simpler life to city dwellers. It is difficult for me to discern any overtly religious feeling here, although, as we will see in the conclusion, Hardwar's cachet as a holy place has become one more marketable attraction to entice people there. Aside from city people buying vacation retreats, Hardwar is also an attractive environment for retirees, and although this trend has become more pronounced in recent years, it has been visible since at least the turn of the last century (SDG 1909: 89).

Yet for others, the decision to settle there seems to have been influenced by something deeper than the desire for country living, since the peace they describe comes not from the external environment, but from some internal spiritual satisfaction. One such man was Mr. Sharma, an engineer whose guru had ordered him to renounce everything after retirement and go live a beggar's life in Hardwar.[34] Sharma had spent four months walking from Madhya Pradesh to Hardwar, during which he claimed to have lacked for nothing, and he had lived on the *ghat* as a beggar since he arrived there. This was a man with some real radiance, and the first words he spoke to me (in English) had to do with the peace that he felt in Hardwar.[35]

This sort of peace, "which passes all understanding," entails a far more intense religious dimension and has historically been one of the elements

drawing people to settle here. One ideal in the pilgrimage literature is *tirtha-vas*, or "dwelling at a pilgrimage place." This is more than simply shifting one's residence but rather a qualitative break with one's past life. The ideal is to live a detached, religiously oriented life, in harmony with the prevailing religious environment. The people who come in search of this peaceful quality also help to create it, and they sanctify Hardwar by their presence, sincerity, and devotion.

As with most ideals, this is at best imperfectly fulfilled. Just as Hardwar is not always a holy place (as described in chapter 4), in the same way, those who come to live there often have mixed motives, combining clear religious aspirations with the desire for a less stressful environment. People reported shuttling for a few months between Hardwar and Delhi or Hardwar and Bombay. For some, this may be only a change of scenery, but for others, such as an elderly friend at the Advaita Puri Ashram, these visits provided the opportunity for more intensive religious practice, which could eventually transform him.

This section has generally discussed certain Hindu assumptions, such as attributing power to the Ganges, the notion that Hardwar is a place where people can obtain religious merit, or the notion that certain times are more auspicious than others, without investigating what actual pilgrims really think of these. The emphasis here has been on the outlines of the tradition, but there must be more specific investigation, and this takes place in the next chapter. One cannot assume that everyone literally believes these things (or, for that matter, believes them at all) or that such beliefs have been somehow unaffected by the other forces at work in Indian society. To give sharper focus to these issues, I want to look more carefully at two specific pilgrimages: a seasonal pilgrimage that begins in Hardwar and often ends in a pilgrim's own village, and a trip through "god's gateway" (*hari-dvar*) into the Himalayas. Both journeys show the differing motives that can lie behind the decision to go on pilgrimage, as well as the ways in which people can understand their journey. The material from these are then used as lenses to examine some larger questions about pilgrimage to Hardwar and Hindu pilgrimage as a whole: questions of authority, holiness, religious merit, and the forces shaping attitudes toward modern pilgrimage.

Bringing Home the Ganges

Twice a year, as the moon wanes during the lunar months of Phalgun and Shravan, thousands upon thousands of pilgrims stream into Hardwar. These pilgrims bathe in the Ganges and visit local sites, but their primary purpose lies



FIGURE 7.2. *Kanvar* pilgrims departing Hardwar. The men at left and right are wearing identical shirts (doubtless made in Hardwar) with pictures of the god Shiva and his wife Parvati. The group's *kanvars* show characteristic variety—some decorated with tinsel and streamers, others surmounted by templelike structures and tridents cut from sheet Styrofoam. The water vessels are suspended below the carrying pole and are covered with cloths bearing pictures of Shiva and Hanuman (the latter deity for his strength and devotion, the former as the object of the pilgrims' devotion).

elsewhere: before departing, they draw water from the Ganges, which they carry on foot to various temples as an offering to Shiva. They time their departures to arrive on particular days: in Phalgun (February–March) on the festival of Shivaratri, and in Shravan (July–August)—a month dedicated to Shiva—on the waning moon's thirteenth day, a day dedicated to Shiva in every month as the *pradosh vrat*.[36] The festivals' defining object is a *kanvar*, a bamboo pole with receptacles at each end that is carried on one shoulder (Figure 7.2). Despite long-attested references to *kanvar*s, including reports of using them to transport Ganges water, the Hardwar festivals are far more recent, and they have clearly grown dramatically in the last two decades.[37]

Seen from outside, this pilgrimage is a rite of worship and sacrifice, in which pilgrims carry Ganges water to offer to Shiva. Some pilgrims described it as purely devotional, but many more connected this rite with more mundane concerns, such as getting a job, fixing a marriage, passing an examination, or

obtaining a son. Many pilgrims perform this rite for benefits already received, in order to fulfill a vow ("If X happens, I will carry a *kanvar*") they had made when seeking divine blessings.[38] Since this rite intersects many people's most pressing concerns, it is also not surprising that many pilgrims evaded this question. One man described it only as being on "god's account book"; others used the cryptic word *iccha* ("desire")—which could indicate a particular desire, a general inclination to perform the rite, or simply an answer so that I would leave them alone.

Aside from its religious dimensions, the festival is also clearly a social occasion. In Shravan, one often sees groups of ten or twenty men from a single village who arrive together, roam around Hardwar, and then depart en masse. For them, this was a religiously sanctioned excursion with their friends and companions, and the pilgrim demeanor in these large groups was light and festive, with members often singing and dancing as they walked.

The image of Shiva here is of an omnipotent god who is also simple and liberal to his devotees; pilgrims call him Ashutosh, "quickly satisfied," and Bholanath, the "Simple Lord." Shiva does not keep accounts and balances but gives without reservation to those whose faith and devotion please him. In this divine economy, one can receive anything one needs in exchange for some Ganges water and a handful of leaves—in striking contrast to worldly merchants. The pilgrims doing this rite for benefits already received do so to fulfill their obligation, and also to give thanksgiving and public witness. These men and women have been touched by grace, and their faith and gratitude are reflected in the emphasis on purity and austerity (*tapas*), the rite's two other major themes.

Purity is necessary because the water will eventually be offered in a temple—a ritually pure place. The flowing Ganges is always pure, but once pilgrims draw the water, they must retain that purity until they have reached their destination. Many pilgrims begin by immersing themselves and their *kanvar*s in the Ganges, but after that, the primary means to conserve the water's purity is to keep the *kanvar* off the ground—by holding it, by giving it to someone else, or by setting it on racks set up in the resting places. Aside from this, different groups followed different purity standards—often set by the party's group leader—but everyone agreed that the water had to be kept off the ground. Given this universal emphasis, it was remarkable that no one in 1990 could tell me why this was so important.

The final theme, *tapas*, harks back to the days when pilgrimage was a strenuous and difficult endeavor. Most *kanvar* pilgrims carry the water on foot, and the hardships they endure are a sign of their sincerity, as well as an additional offering to Shiva. Most of these pilgrims came from the surrounding areas, and, with rare exceptions, were within 150 miles of home. Their departure

patterns showed that most planned to walk about twenty-five miles per day, despite winter rains in Phalgun, a broiling sun in Shravan, and the inevitable pains and blisters. Some pilgrims even enhance these hardships by deliberately adopting stricter practices, such as continuous travel to their destination, making the journey in bare feet (sometimes dragging their shoes behind them), or vowing to perform the pilgrimage for multiple consecutive years.

This festival is clearly one of the ritual actions known as *vrat*s ("vows"). Some *vrat*s are associated with particular festivals, such as Shivaratri, and thus occur only once a year. Others can be celebrated throughout the year, such as the *solah somvar* ("sixteen Mondays") *vrat*, celebrated on sixteen consecutive Mondays. Still others are celebrated on particular lunar days, such as the *ekadashi* ("eleventh day") *vrat* in each half of the lunar cycle, whereas others occur on particular days of the week. The variety is almost endless, but most *vrat*s share certain basic features: a specified time for performance, a general ritual framework—often including dietary restrictions and a reading of the *vrat*'s charter myth—and a declaration of the *vrat*'s benefits. Many people perform these rites religiously—that is, with attention, sincerity, and care—and yet many of these same people are reluctant to describe these *vrat*s in purely instrumental ways ("Do X, Get Y").

The *kanvar* pilgrimage shows all of these features and also reflects the social realities of its primary performers—north Indian men. It is a highly public rite, which mirrors men's role in Indian public life. It requires strenuous exertion, determination, and endurance—all stereotypically male qualities. It generally requires at least a week to complete, but happens only once a year—fitting in with men's time constraints either to obtain leave from their jobs or to find a slack period in the agricultural cycle. Finally, as noted previously, the vow to carry a *kanvar* is often made to obtain concrete benefits, and these are often connected with major life goals.[39]

These features differ from women's *vrat*s, which tend to reinforce their roles as wives and mothers. Women's rites tend to be done at home, throughout the year, and they usually involve regular, undramatic cycles of fasting and worship. Women may perform these rites to attain concrete goals, but often do them to maintain the family's general well-being and thus their own (McGee 1991). The contrast between women's rites and the *kanvar* pilgrimage clearly reflects men and women's differing social roles, yet both aim to influence and promote human welfare through conscious, focused action.

When I first encountered these festivals in 1990, I was both puzzled and amazed: amazed by their size, color, and vibrancy, and puzzled because I had never heard about them. Local people insisted that they had been practiced "since time immemorial," and Baba Amarnath even cited a (spurious) verse

from the *Ramcharitmanas* to support this, but persistent incongruities led me to doubt these claims. First, there was virtually no literature on the festival, which one would expect for an "established" rite. Not only was it absent from the district gazetteers but also the only Hindi pamphlets dated from just the previous year. A second incongruity was the problems with the charter myth. Two pamphlets cited the same charter myth—that Shiva saved the cosmos by placing the deadly *halahala* poison in his throat and was given water to soothe his pain—but one pamphlet locates this final event at the Nilkanth Mahadev temple near Rishikesh, and the other pamphlet at the Pura Mahadev temple in district Meerut.[40] Both temples are now destinations for *kanvar* pilgrims, so these stories seem like clear attempts to channel pilgrim traffic to these sites. A further problem with this charter was that not even one pilgrim cited this story, showing that it had yet to percolate down to the street. A third incongruity was the festival's ritual fluidity: there seemed to be no established ritual procedure, other than the need to keep the water off the ground.[41] Pilgrims constantly stressed that one could do whatever one felt was appropriate, but wouldn't one expect that an "ancient" practice would have a better codified form? A final incongruity was the age of the *kanvar seva sangh*s ("associations for serving *kanvar* carriers") that provide the pilgrims with food, shelter, tea, and medicine along the way. Many associations posted announcements inviting pilgrims to be their guests, but in 1990, the oldest one of these was only seven years old. If the festival was old, why were these so recently organized?

My initial judgment that this festival was still developing was confirmed by the changes I saw during a return visit for the Shravan festival in 1996. I had suspected that pilgrim numbers would increase, and 1996 saw an estimated 700,000 pilgrims, almost triple the number in 1990. More tellingly, Hardwar's marketplace was much better organized for this trade, from the open-air *kanvar* emporium on Irrigation Department land to roving silkscreen artists who could immediately print an identical T-shirt for every member in a group. There was no new literature but an astounding variety of cassette tapes, many set to the latest film songs. The time allotted for water offerings at the Pura Mahadev temple had been increased from two to eighteen hours, and the pilgrim torrent on the Delhi-Hardwar road forced the authorities to close it to vehicles for an entire week. Such adjustments showed not only that the festival was getting larger but also that it was becoming more established and better organized.

Interim research had also given me better historical perspective, which helped to explain some of its puzzling aspects. The first clue was discovering that similar pilgrimages had been performed on Mauritius since 1898 (Cascaro and Zimmerman 1987) and at West Bengal's Tarakeshvar temple since the

early twentieth century (Morinis 1984: 93–96). The model for both of these was almost certainly Bihar's Vaidyanath temple, and references to this festival date to 1791 (Hunter 1897: 282).[42] Hamilton's 1828 account sounds little different from Hardwar's contemporary festival, both in motive and in practice:

> Pilgrims resorting to Baidyanath usually bring water with them from the prayagas, or sacred junctions on the Ganges, and pour it over the lingam, round which they walk a certain number of times.... Some pray to be kings in the next transmigration, or for such worldly enjoyments as they prefer; others pray for happiness in the heaven of the divinity they address; while some ... pray to be released from existence altogether.... On his shoulders every man bears a semicircular frame of bamboo, with a basket at each end. (Hamilton 1828: 112)

Based on Chaubey's (1958) and Anand's (1990) descriptions, Vaidyanath's *kanvar* pilgrimage is still going strong, and in 1990, one small but important clue hinted that it was the Hardwar festival's ultimate source—the only available *kanvar*-themed cassette tape focused not on Hardwar, but on Vaidyanath (Prabhakar and Rajalaksmi 1990).

Vaidyanath's pilgrims have grafted the *kanvar* rite onto Vaidyanath's *jyotirlinga* charter myth (*Shiva Purana* 4.28). In the story, Ravana received a boon from Shiva after long trials and requested that Shiva live in his palace in Lanka—which would have made Ravana invincible. Shiva agreed to accompany Ravana in the form of a *linga* but warned Ravana that wherever the *linga* touched the earth, it would stick there immovably. Ravana agreed to this condition, but as he was flying back to Lanka, he realized that he needed to urinate—an urge that *Shiva Purana* (4.28.17) describes as caused by Shiva himself. The boon's condition meant that Ravana couldn't put down the *linga*, but he also couldn't continue to hold it; since urination renders a person ritually impure, he would defile the *linga* if he touched it before bathing. Ravana finally ordered a nearby cowherd to hold the *linga*, but the cowherd's strength eventually failed, and the *linga* stuck fast to the earth. Here the *Shiva Purana* concludes by praising Vaidyanath's greatness and the benefits of worship there (4.28.18–21), and later tradition adds the charter for offering water. According to this story, Ravana's attempts to lift the *linga* eventually broke its top—a feature reportedly still visible (O'Malley 1984: 256). This desecration brought him back to his senses, and he started worshipping Shiva with Ganges water from the Himalayas.[43]

In *Banaras: City of Light*, Diana Eck describes "spatial transposition" as one of the important strategies for reinforcing a *tirtha's* holiness. On one hand, various places around the country are religiously identified with Benares (such

as Uttarkashi and Guptkashi in the Himalayas). On the other, various places in Benares are identified as containing pilgrimage sites from all over India. Both of these transpositions reinforce the city's position as a holy site—the former by making it the ideal to the emulated, and the latter by claiming that since it contains all the sacred sites, it is thus the holiest of all (1982: 283–84). One of my reviewers extended this idea to describe the *kanvar* pilgrimage as "festival transposition"—that is, taking a festival celebration from one place and moving it to another. One clear difference between these is that "spatial transposition" highlights the sites' connection and identity, whereas in this instance "festival transposition" obscures the original site, as a way to reinforce the claim that the festival is an age-old practice in its new setting. This source cloaking has been very successful in Hardwar, since only a few smudgy fingerprints point toward Vaidyanath as the festival's ultimate source. Vaidyanath has this festival's best attested history, and taking it as the Hardwar pilgrimage's ultimate source explains several things, including why the water had to be kept off the ground—which no one in Hardwar could tell me in 1990. Ravana's failure to do this frustrated his desire, and in 1996, a single Hardwar pilgrim cited this example, suggesting that they were subject to the same condition. Taking Vaidyanath as the source also explains why Hardwar's festival had no consistent charter myth: the original charter is specific to Vaidyanath and cannot be used anywhere else. This also explains the dearth of literature, both Sanskrit and vernacular. Yet even though identifying Vaidyanath as the ultimate source for this festival cleared up many questions, it also raised a bigger one—why bother to transplant a rite from one place to another? The answer to this final question is taken up in the final chapter.

Through God's Door, into the Himalayas

A primary element in Hardwar's religious identity is being the threshold between the mountains and the north Indian plain. It is the gateway through which the Ganges comes down from the mountains and also through which humans ascend to the land of the gods. Hardwar's busy season corresponds with the Himalayan pilgrimage season, and for many summer visitors, Hardwar is primarily a place to arrange their onward journey. In 1990, my wife, Rachel, and I joined a group of these pilgrims for a twelve-day tour of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. These are collectively known as the *char dham* ("Four Divine Abodes"), and each is an important sacred center—Yamunotri and Gangotri are ritual centers for the rivers (and goddesses) Yamuna and Ganga, Kedarnath is one of Shiva's twelve *jyotirlinga*s, and Badrinath is sacred

to Vishnu.[44] Our experiences on this journey provide another lens through which to examine contemporary pilgrimage—and one that helped to focus many important issues for me, particularly how modernization and social change have affected ideas about pilgrimage.

These changes have been more compressed in the Himalayas than in the rest of India, since the region's remoteness has long insulated it from social change. Even in the early twentieth century, Himalayan pilgrimage still held to its traditional pattern. Pilgrims would begin ascending to the shrines after Hardwar's mid-April Baisakhi fair, and they could be reasonably sure that the paths to the shrines would be free from snow by the time they arrived. The wealthy could hire horses, but most people traveled on foot. The pilgrim route had a network of pilgrim shelters (*chatti*s) spaced about every ten miles, at which pilgrims could also purchase staple foods.[45] The trip would have proceeded in well-defined stages for months on end, and such slow progress would have heightened the pilgrims' anticipation as they approached their destinations.[46] Their eventual arrival would have been a powerful experience—fueled by this growing anticipation, by the near certainty that they would never see it again, and by the continual danger of death en route, most often from diseases such as cholera but from exposure, accidents, bandits, and attacks by wild animals as well.

Travelers still walk the final stages to Yamunotri and Kedarnath, but otherwise things have changed considerably. Whereas fifty years ago a *char dham* trip would have required months of travel, I booked a twelve-day package tour with the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam ("Garhwal Region Development Corporation," from here on, simply "Nigam"). Our itinerary showed that most of our time would be spent on the bus, but for me the tour had two compelling attractions: guaranteed lodging and transportation at the height of the pilgrim season and the chance to spend two weeks with a single pilgrim group, to get a sense of what this trip meant to them.[47] I had also chosen this tour for demographic reasons, since its cost (1,700 rupees per person) meant that our companions would probably be middle-class, urban Hindus, who have received very little attention as a group, even though their participation in contemporary life is changing the tradition.[48] In fact, our companions were largely educated and professional people from Delhi or Calcutta: three bank officers, a Hindustan Paper executive, a Calcutta University professor, a two-career couple (genetic engineer and electrical engineer), and a retired man whose two sons were high-ranking military officers.[49] All were traveling "with family," in configurations that included spouses, parents, and children.

The first few days were difficult and dented my idealized notions about people taking this trip to get closer to God. Our tour bus arrived late at the

pickup site, and when it arrived, we discovered that it was not a Nigam tour bus, but a smaller private bus. Next came half an hour of confusion and dissatisfaction while we sorted out the seating, and by the time we finally departed, several hours behind schedule, tempers were frayed and people were beginning to complain. The day's final setback came as the bus crept into the town of Chamba, our first night's stopping place, only to find the road blocked by an enormous mound of cement. Our guide—who was losing his voice and looking visibly weary—first abused the builders for blocking the road, then grabbed a shovel and started digging. After ten minutes, he had cleared a space for the bus, and we arrived at the rest house absolutely exhausted, a consistent pattern throughout the trip.

Grumbling and whining—about the bus, the food, the lodging, and the schedule—continued for the next few days, and although largely confined to a few vocal malcontents, their dissatisfaction tainted everyone's mood.[50] Conflict finally erupted on the third day, when we were walking back from Yamunotri. Our guide assured us that the bus was a hundred yards down the road, although a better estimate would have been half a mile. My wife and I continued walking until we found it, but about half the party thought they had missed the bus and stood waiting in the rain for the better part of an hour. When one of them finally found the bus, he was foaming with rage, and when the driver refused to back the bus up the road, he started screaming at the driver and whacking the bus with his stick. Neither of these pleased the driver—since he also owned the bus—and he took a walk to compose himself while the stragglers filed in. When he returned, he calmly observed that we had returned several hours late, which meant that he would have to drive in the dark on mountain roads, and that yelling and whacking his bus were unbecoming behavior for educated (*padhe-likhe*) people. His assailant responded with another angry outburst, and even though he was clearly being irrational, and several people privately characterized his behavior as disgraceful, the general mood was cranky and unhappy.

The troubles peaked the next evening as we were pulling into Gangotri, after a full day on the bus. One of the men had argued with the guide about fifteen minutes earlier, and as the bus crept into the parking lot, the man's wife began mumbling to herself, increasing her volume until she finally burst into a torrent of abuse, in which she called the guide a "dog," as well as several choicer epithets. The guide responded with counterabuse, he was set upon by the woman's husband, and it seemed that things were about to get ugly. Several men rushed between them, and the previous day's malcontent begged the guide's pardon, in a desperate attempt to keep the peace. He managed to get the guide off the bus, and the time and effort needed to unload the luggage were enough to calm everyone down.

To say the least, these incidents startled me. I had not expected our companions to be saints, but such behavior seemed inappropriate even for the bazaar, much less for a pilgrim journey, and other people's responses showed that they agreed. Several women quietly apologized to my wife, with nervous remarks about what we must be thinking of Indians, while our visibly disgusted driver remarked that if people kept acting like this, what benefit could they possibly gain from their journey? Yet this outburst was ultimately the storm that brought the calm, and the rest of the trip passed with no serious incidents. One possible explanation is that people were gradually adjusting to our standard of living, although a few complained about this throughout the trip. A more important factor was the realization that if these disturbances continued, they would poison the entire trip. The man whose wife had abused the guide later commented that his mood had been "spoiled," and this affected his entire experience of Gangotri, since we stayed there only one night. For whatever reason, from that point on, things gradually improved, as did our sense of group identity.

Given this troubled group dynamic, the chance to trek to Yamunotri was a blessing. When my wife and I got off the bus at Hanuman Chatti—a small village filled with filthy shops, noise, and confusion—we asked directions from a passerby, and ten minutes later, we were walking on a quiet mountain path. The distance to our night halt at Janaki Chatti was only four and a half miles, but the next day, we first had to travel four miles to Yamunotri, and then the entire distance back to Hanuman Chatti. This latter journey over hilly and stony paths stretched many people's capacities to their limit—some were old, and others in poor condition—and our companion's infantile outburst that evening was surely influenced by sheer exhaustion.

Rachel and I stayed at Yamunotri only two hours, which was more than enough—in 1990, it was clearly the least important and least developed of the four sites, and reports from 2006 indicate that this is still true.[51] Some small, dirty stalls lined the path close to the shrine, but there was nothing resembling a town. The shrine area had a fine new temple—which was tightly locked—but the image of the goddess Yamuna was housed in a small, plain shed. The whole place seemed rundown, which surely makes it difficult to generate patronage; I heard one *pujari* abusing a visitor for offering only two rupees. In 1990, this was the only site where the *panda*s invited me to do *puja* (although by 2002, this was happening in the other places as well), and it was the only place lacking a signboard or printed flyer advertising the religious rites one could commission. In fact, Yamunotri's major attraction is not a temple but natural hot springs that have been channeled into bathing pools. We had our baths and took *darshan*, sat for a little while watching pilgrims, and then departed without a second glance.

None of these things were true for Gangotri, at which we arrived the following evening. In 1990, Gangotri was a small but clearly identifiable town. It had grown rapidly since becoming accessible by road in 1985, when a bridge was built over the gorge at Bhairon Ghat, ten kilometers south, but even before then, Gangotri had *dharamshala*s, rest houses, and other pilgrim infrastructure that Yamunotri lacked.[52] One center of ritual activity is the riverbank itself—which saw the construction of beautiful new *ghat*s in 1998—but there is also a magnificent temple, built in the 1880s by the Maharaja of Jaipur.[53] It is clearly a richer temple than Yamunotri and far better organized at generating patronage. In 1990, Gangotri had a prominent sign board (as did Kedarnath and Badrinath) listing the rites one could commission and their respective cost—from 21 rupees for a simple camphor *arati* to 2,001 rupees for festival ceremonies; one could also endow a ceremony on a particular day every year for a one-time fee ranging from 101 to 5,001 rupees.[54]

Perhaps spurred by these surroundings, our evening and morning in Gangotri saw considerably more ritual activity than at Yamunotri. At eight P.M., the entire town gathered at the temple for the evening *arati*, at which the *pujari* first waved his lamp to illuminate the temple's image, but then also waved it to his right toward the river and toward its source in the mountains behind us, to remind us of Ganga's material presence. According to our companions, during the *arati* Ganga became present in yet another form, by "descending" onto and possessing a man in the watching crowd.[55] Arms flailing wildly, he began to leap several feet into the air, shouting, "Victory to Mother Ganges!" again and again. He tried to rush the temple but was gently intercepted by one of the temple brahmins, who then folded his hands to pay homage to the man as a vessel for the deity. The next morning was devoted to various sorts of ritual activity: bathing, temple worship, and ancestral rites such as *pindadan*.[56] We left Gangotri at ten in the morning, and as the bus pulled out, one person wistfully observed that he could have stayed there the entire time.

We spent that day and the next traveling down the Bhagirathi River valley and then up the Mandakini River valley toward Kedarnath. The first day was delightful, for we traveled only sixty miles, stopping on the way to bathe at the Gangnani hot springs. We arrived at Uttarkashi by mid-afternoon, and the group had enough energy to visit local temples and the bazaar. The next day's journey to Guptkashi was more stressful, for we traveled 150 miles over very slow roads. In Guptkashi, many people went into town to visit its small but ancient temple, but everyone was careful to go to bed early, for we knew what the next day would bring.

By eight the next morning, we had arrived at Gaurikund, where the trek to Kedarnath begins. Although modern transportation has largely attenuated the

hardships formerly associated with pilgrimage, the trip to Kedarnath vividly shows how Himalayan pilgrimage must have been. The nine-mile path is just a bit longer than the walk to Yamunotri, but it is much more difficult: the road to Yamunotri climbs 3,900 feet and winds entirely through the forest, whereas for Kedarnath, the altitude gain is almost a mile, with the latter half above the tree line. The specter of the climb persuaded several members of our party to hire horses, including a seventy-year-old woman who had walked to and from Yamunotri.

For me, each part of the journey was difficult. At Gaurikund, the weather was sunny and mild, but Delhi belly was giving me violent stomach pains. After several miles, I found a trailside latrine, after which my stomach troubles abated, though I still felt weak. A light rain began to fall at Rambara, the half-way point, and Rachel and I took a tea break to see what the weather would do. Within fifteen minutes, the rain had ceased, and we resumed walking, but the weather had clearly turned, and the lowering clouds, falling temperature, and gusting winds augured the coming storm. The rain soon resumed, blown by winds from every direction, so that despite our umbrellas, our lower bodies were completely soaked. A stop at another tea stall sheltered us from the rain, but even there, we were chilled by the wind. After half an hour, the rain slackened and we pushed on, preferring walking in the rain to sitting motionless in that cold wind.

The last two miles were extremely difficult. The rain alternated between moderate and driving, a cutting wind came off the glaciers, and the streams of icy water washed mud onto the path, covering the stones with a slippery film of horse manure. My hands started losing sensation, and my judgment was becoming less reliable—both clear signs of hypothermia—and despite my efforts to focus, I fell and scraped my hand, then had to dive to save my umbrella, which was almost carried away by a gust of wind. I walked the final half-mile in a daze, continuing largely by force of will, and when we reached our hotel, we slept until evening, utterly exhausted. Yet despite my genuine suffering, the most stunning moment on that entire trip—still utterly vivid nineteen years later—was my first glimpse of the Kedarnath temple framed by the snowcapped peaks, with the green of the surrounding hills intensified by the lowering skies.

At the time, I would have gladly exchanged that memory for an easier trip, but the experience taught me several important things and helped me identify with other pilgrims, present and past. The trailside latrine testified that I was not the only person with stomach trouble, and even in the early twentieth century, epidemics could kill thousands in a single year. The climate would have been equally capricious, except that earlier pilgrims—like some of my companions that day—would have been less well equipped: many people were walking

in sandals or in bare feet, and many others had no umbrellas or raingear. Many fellow travelers were older people, and if I could feel myself being pushed to the limit of my endurance, what must they have felt? My experience thus helped me imagine the trials that past pilgrims had faced and understand better why Himalayan pilgrimage was so often described as a perilous endeavor that could end in death.[57]

Yet aside from the suffering, there was a clear sense of getting something more. Kedarnath had a palpable energy, as if pilgrims collectively realized that it was a special place, although the day's austerities may have focused their attention even more than usual. The town's focal point is the Kedarnath temple—at which the image is not only one of the twelve *jyotirlinga*s, the holiest places for Shiva's devotees, but also a "self-manifested" (*svayambhu*) *linga*, where Shiva has spontaneously revealed himself. In 1990, the exterior was completely plain but the interior lavishly carved, and although this architectural style is consistent with other Himalayan temples, it could also symbolize how Shiva transcends all duality.[58] The evening *arati* was so crowded that my wife decided to forgo entering the temple, but I felt compelled to go in. As I inched my way forward through the temple, pressed on every side by pilgrims straining for a glimpse of the *jyotirlinga*, I felt something of Kedarnath's power, as well as the strength of their faith.

Kedarnath's 11,700-foot elevation was both our journey's highest point and its psychological apex. Everyone knew that this would be the hardest part, and as we walked down the next day—in brilliant sunshine and shirtsleeve weather—we knew that we had come through the last trial. The end of the trip was coming soon, and all we had to do until then was ride the bus. Our group's shared experience of suffering—almost everyone had made the trip on foot—had also bound us together and helped generate a sense of group feeling. Although a far cry from Victor Turner's *communitas*, in which all social boundaries are erased, I had certainly gained greater respect for these people, which tempered my earlier annoyance. We were also dead tired, and this undoubtedly helped to sedate everyone for the last few days.

Our final stop in Badrinath seemed like paradise: we rode the bus all the way to the hotel, and the town had electricity, a dozen restaurants at which one could eat, and a fully stocked marketplace.[59] We arrived at three in the afternoon, and when I went to the temple, I found two-thirds of the party waiting in line with me. Although several people commissioned *puja* at Kedarnath, at Badrinath people went only for *darshan* in the afternoon, after which everyone rested. The next day, most people took a taxi to see the sights in the Mana Valley, but since this area was closed to foreigners at the time, my wife and I wandered around town instead.[60] Our guide had told us to be ready to leave at

eleven in the morning—the road to Badrinath is so narrow that all traffic is one-way, and so convoys of vehicles leave at regularly timed "gates"—but the group staged a noncooperation movement, and we ended up departing for Joshimath at two.

After we settled in at Joshimath, one of our companions "humbly" requested Rachel and me to not go out for dinner that evening but to eat with them at the rest house. I agreed without giving the matter much thought, but I later discovered that this man had sponsored the entire farewell meal: several different vegetable dishes—including one without onion, which two people did not eat—rice, dal, and breads, with mangos and sweets for dessert. It was a festive occasion, filled with laughing and joking, and it gently erased any lingering bitterness from the trip's beginning. One person called it a *bidai samaroh*, which literally means "farewell celebration" but carries profound emotional weight. In north India, *bidai* is the "farewell" for a bride departing for her marital home and connotes the irreparable rupture of close emotional bonds. This was literally true for my wife and me, for we were not returning to Rishikesh with the group but instead were planning to travel east to Kumaon before returning to Hardwar. After the meal, I tipped the driver and the guide, thanking them both for their help, and was astounded and embarrassed when the latter touched my feet. That night, we said our good-byes and exchanged addresses, and early the next morning, we gathered our things and slipped quietly away.

Our Himalayan tour began and ended in Hardwar, which has traditionally been the Himalayas' physical and ritual gateway. Even though Hardwar appears only as the threshold for this particular trip, this book is not only about a place but also about a process—striving to trace the relationship between the changes in religious life and practice and the changes in the larger society that these reflect. The *char dham* trip threw many of these questions into sharper focus, just as a trip to the Himalayas in February had finally helped me to recognize Hardwar's seasonal economy. The issues and questions raised as a result of this latter Himalayan journey are relevant not only to Hardwar but also to other pilgrimage places in north India, and they are addressed in the concluding chapter.

8

Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in a Changing World

What is the best paradigm for the trip described in the previous chapter, in which Rachel and I accompanied some middle-class urban Hindus on a structured journey to four Himalayan shrines? Was it a pilgrimage, was it a vacation, was it cultural tourism—a vacation trip to places with historic or religious significance—or was it some of each? More important, how did our companions conceive of their journey, and what, if anything, did they hope to gain from it? Although my initial remarks focus on that particular journey, the questions raised here are plainly relevant not only to Hardwar but also more generally to Hindu pilgrimage, and the ways in which it is being transformed by Indian social change.

These changes have been even more apparent in the Himalayas, because the pace of change has been more rapid there. One major factor in the rate of change has been the region's overall development, particularly the advent of easier transportation and more comfortable facilities. Whereas Himalayan pilgrimage used to be a long, difficult endeavor, these amenities have brought visitors in ever-increasing numbers—just as the railway's arrival significantly shifted Hardwar's pilgrimage patterns more than a century ago. A subtler force has been state government efforts—earlier Uttar Pradesh, and now Uttarakhand—to promote hill tourism as a source of income for the local people. The Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam not only organized our tour but also owned and managed the tour infrastructure (buses and rest houses). Having chosen to

promote tourism as a vehicle for economic development, the state government has moved to market this, just as it would do for any other business. Although we have often seen connections between religion and business, the government's influence is so powerful that such promotion has powerful effects.

A later section specifically examines how tourism promotion affects people's ideas about pilgrimage and pilgrimage places. Promoting travel to these places as tourism will inevitably change how people think about them, especially their attitudes toward hardships on the way. Pilgrim journeys are propelled by faith, piety, and the desire for religious merit. The pilgrimage literature tends to stress both the site's holiness and the need for faith and disciplined practice, which turns any hardships into a vehicle for self-transformation (see Figure 8.1.). In contrast, tourists are seeking enjoyment, entertainment, and ease. "Adventure tourists" accept manageable difficulties—after all, these are part of the "adventure"—but most other tourists are not interested in enduring hardships and certainly not in understanding them as religious discipline. These differing sets of assumptions help to explain the bitter complaining and shocking scenes that marked our trip into the mountains. Many of our companions did *not* see their *char dham* journey as an opportunity to gain religious merit through worship and powerful *darshan*s; they had signed up for a vacation, and the company was not delivering the goods. This attitude poorly prepared them for our journey's hardships: long bus rides on winding mountain roads, nourishing but monotonous meals, and clean but spartan lodging. A vacation mentality can also help to explain some our companions' aversion to physical discomfort and persistent demands for service—because they weren't getting the service they wanted.

Remarks en route clearly showed that some of our companions did not consider the trip a pilgrimage. One man admitted that he had come only because political disruption ruled out travel to Kashmir; for him, this was a journey to a cooler place. Another man complained throughout the trip, contrasting our "hardships" with a friend's glowing account of a similar tour earlier in May. A third man scandalized some of our more conservative companions by spending the nights drinking liquor with our guide. The most explicit denial came from a woman who told my wife that this was a tour, not a pilgrimage (*tirthayatra*); she said that on pilgrimage we would travel more slowly, visit more temples, and devote more time to *puja* and other religious activity—the exact pattern that characterized Himalayan pilgrimage a century ago.

Yet for some other people—often older people—the trip clearly seemed more than a tour. One man said that he had picked the tour for his mother—that she was getting old, and this would be her last chance for such a strenuous trip.[1] Besides his concern for his mother, this man's ritual activity clearly



FIGURE 8.1. Pilgrim after Ganges bath. Thakur Girish Chand worked in a Delhi brass factory, and one Sunday (his weekly holiday) he made a day trip to Hardwar for a Ganges bath. When I requested a picture, he insisted on striking this pose, and his simple, sincere piety echoes that of so many other pilgrims.

showed that he had some feeling of his own: he did *puja* and *pindadan* at Gangotri and *puja* at Kedarnath, and he took temple *darshan*s at all our stops. Filial piety for his mother probably helped to shape his attitude, since his wife's unflattering comparisons with an earlier tour of South India clearly showed that she saw this trip as a flawed vacation.

The clearest example was an elderly man I called Dadaji ("Grandfather"), who was traveling with his daughter-in-law and his grandson. Although he never explicitly said so, as the trip progressed, it became clear that he was doing this for deeper reasons. His daughter-in-law confided that the whole trip had been his idea and that she and her son had came along just to keep him company. This man genuinely impressed me by his humility, humanity, and

integrity. Throughout the trip, he hardly uttered a word of complaint, despite recurring stomach upsets and problems in finding suitable food; he did not eat onions, which are pervasive in hill food. Another companion called him our group's "hero" for walking the entire way to both Yamunotri and Kedarnath, and after the latter, he gleefully recounted how he had slipped in a snow field on the way down and slid to the bottom on his rear end! He was always eager to visit temples at smaller stops along the way, where he would ask the *pujari*s various questions, and occasional remarks of his revealed a rich inner piety, which this trip was clearly a means to develop further.[2]

The ends of the spectrum provide the clearest examples, but most people would fall somewhere in between. Many of our companions performed religious rituals—taking *darshan* at temples, doing *puja*, or bathing in rivers and hot springs—but in many cases, the journey's religious dimension did not seem terribly important. At the journey's end, I asked one man if he was glad he had come, and although his immediate response was affirmative, most of his answer stressed the need to adapt to circumstances—that any trip would have its problems, and he was ready to eat what came, sleep where he could, and not worry about things he couldn't control. Does this response show a pilgrim's detachment, a traveler's pragmatism, or both?[3]

Historical inquiry quickly reveals that past travelers also had multiple ends, although their nature has varied from era to era. Yet it is also clear that Hindu ideas about pilgrimage are changing and evolving, partly driven by infrastructural changes such as better transportation, but even more by the past century's nearly unimaginable social changes. People's ideas are framed in the idiom of their times and reflect the forces active in those times—and must do so if these ideas are to remain vital. The following sections address three forces affecting Hindu pilgrimage in both ideas and practice: changing notions about pilgrimage itself, changes rooted in the promotion of tourism—both changes in the sites themselves and in people's ideas about them—and changes stemming from the rise of Hindu nationalism. The final section works from these three forces to venture conclusions on modern Hindu pilgrimage.

Changing Paradigms

Changing perspectives on traditional religious paradigms are an important factor affecting contemporary pilgrimage ideas. The traditional paradigm promised both tangible benefits, such as attaining one's desires, and intangible benefits, such as destroying sins (*pap*) and generating religious merit (*punya*). Current practice clearly shows that the hope for tangible benefits still draws

people to Hardwar, since the promise to fulfill one's desires is central to sites such as Mansa Devi and Bilvakeshvar. This was also true for the *kanvar* carriers, many of whom openly admitted that the rite was connected with desires, either to attain something they wanted or to fulfill a promise for something already received.[4] For those seeking tangible benefits, it is also pretty easy to know whether one's prayers have been answered.

The problem is more complex with intangible benefits. Local people were quick to mention them—which could be dismissed as a vested interest—and some pilgrims talked about a Ganges bath destroying their sins, but few visitors said anything at all about religious merit. As one young man succinctly stated, when I pressed him on whether his Ganges bath would bring religious merit, "It is for us to serve, [and] for God to confer the benefits." Given the pilgrimage literature's immense emphasis on religious merit, this reluctance was very surprising. One possible explanation is that destroying sins can be ascribed to the power of the Ganges, an outside agent acting upon one, whereas gaining merit involves claiming spiritual benefits based on one's own actions, which people may have been reluctant to do. Another possible factor is the widespread assumption that "real" pilgrimage involves difficulty and austerity, against which most people's travel falls far short.[5] It is also possible that pilgrims recognize the promises of religious merit—ancient or modern, textual or oral—as "advertisements" for the pilgrimage site. The purpose of advertising is, of course, to sell something, and any intelligent consumer takes such claims with a grain of salt.

People's reluctance to claim merit may also reflect problems with the notion of religious merit, such as the conflicting emphases evident even in the Sanskrit pilgrimage literature. Some passages stress the holiness of the site and report that ritual actions bear fruit regardless of the pilgrim's attitude, but others stress that pilgrims must perform their rites with discipline, restraint, and faith. The first notion lies behind Hardwar's festivals, bathing days, and the host of people vending merit—for whom this notion of the site's holiness has clear economic implications. Yet one can also find the emphasis on purity of heart: one man noted that the fish in the Ganges derived no benefit from bathing in it, and another described the notion that one could intentionally commit sins and then remove them with a Ganges bath as "cheating" the Ganges—that the bath would bring benefits only after reforming one's own heart. Each of these positions reflects a fundamental Hindu religious idea: on one hand, the notion that some places are inherently holy, and on the other, the importance of real commitment. The tension between them can never be fully resolved, since stressing only the first results in a mechanistic attitude toward spiritual life, and focusing only on the second denies the *tirtha*'s power. In

actual practice, each idea balances the other, blurring any definitive claims about how one gains religious merit.

Yet for many educated people, this reluctance to talk about religious merit may well be rooted in a more fundamental shift. When the pilgrimage literature describes generating merit and removing one's sins, it reflects the assumptions of its time. This does not mean that every person believed in these, but the texts describe both as real things, and many people today no longer assume this. One striking aspect of our Himalayan journey was that religious merit and demerit were virtually never mentioned. When we discovered that tea on the road to Yamunotri cost two rupees, one companion quipped that at Yamunotri it would surely be four, since we would be closer to God; this same man later assured me that my soak in Yamunotri's hot springs would bring immense merit. The only serious reference came near the end, when one of the women remarked that the difficulties from the trip to Kedarnath had destroyed many of our sins. She may have meant this literally but could also have been expressing the notion that difficulty or suffering will eventually bring rewards.

These people live in a different age than the authors of the pilgrimage texts, and they have different paradigms for themselves and their world. A contemporary response will be couched in a contemporary idiom, it will reflect contemporary assumptions, and it is misguided to expect otherwise. Just as modern Catholics may doubt the transubstantiation of the Eucharist or modern Buddhists may dismiss stories that miraculous events heralded the Buddha's birth, modern Hindus may have similar doubts about the literal reality of religious merit and demerit. Such doubts, rather than any tension between ritual and devotion, can also explain why they might be reluctant to ascribe merit to their actions. To be sure, many Hindus retain a simple, "traditional" faith—such as the Himachali pilgrims who assured me that a Ganges bath conferred purity—but those who do not must somehow resolve these dissonant worldviews: by discarding the symbols, by ignoring the dissonance, or by reinterpreting these ideas to reflect the contemporary worldview.

The final option is the most constructive, since it meaningfully rearticulates these ideas in a contemporary idiom, but plenty of people choose the other two. Even in Hardwar, one encounters people who explicitly deny Hindu religious ideas or condemn religion as an illusion or a con game. These people are clearly ready to discard the symbols and everything connected with them. Dissonance between conflicting sets of ideas can be managed either by compartmentalizing religious life to keep it separate from everyday life or by simply ignoring apparent contradictions. Both strategies seemed present in my encounter with a Bombay man who claimed to have no faith in the Ganges but who was also carrying a ten-gallon jug of Ganges water![6] A more sophisticated

strategy to manage the dissonance between traditional beliefs and modern context is to rationalize these practices—to show they have "reasonable," "scientific" explanations.[7] I have already alluded to the "studies" proving the bacteriological qualities of the Ganges, and other examples abound. One *panda* regaled me with the scientific reasons for shaving the head after death—doing so contained infectious disease and also functioned like a death announcement—but this same *panda* quickly hushed a nearby barber who mentioned that hair was impure, since impurity was an obviously unscientific notion. Another example found in modern pamphlets is the "scientific perspective" (*vaijnanik drshtikon*) on the Descent of the Ganges: King Sagar's sons are actually workers seeking a channel for the Ganges, they are killed by sunstroke (for which Kapila's yogic power is a metaphor), and Bhagirath is the engineer who finally finds the channel.[8] This account appears only in Hindi-language sources, suggesting that a better educated (and presumably more sophisticated) English-language audience would find it less than credible.

The clearest example of this strategy is a book titled *Akhir Kyo?* ("In the End, Why?"), about which I first heard in 1990 and finally located in 2005. The book is written as a series of questions and answers about Hindu customs and practices: Why do people worship tulsi plants (p. 60)? Why do people burn fires on Holi (p. 5)? Why is shaking hands inappropriate? (p. 47). Many of these questions are first answered from a "religious" (*dharmik)* perspective and then from a scientific perspective. Some of these latter explanations strain credibility, for instance, that clapping during devotional chanting (*kirtan*) creates health-enhancing acupressure (p. 14). Others present Indian cultural assumptions as established fact, such as the notion that foods are either heating or cooling (p. 22), or that the body has subtle channels (*nadis)* that carry energy (p. 67). Many of the scientific explanations cite germ theory, but even when these answers present genuine scientific facts—that shaking hands transfers germs (p. 47) or that the tulsi plant has antibacterial properties (p. 60)—the text ignores that these practices spring from a worldview in which germ theory was completely unknown. Such explanations are obvious attempts to reconcile conflicting paradigms, seemingly without realizing that the symbols are being taken far too literally.

The most sophisticated answers coupled the conviction that these holy places had some sort of transforming power with the notion that one needed to harmonize oneself with that power. This does not necessarily attribute magical qualities to these places, although it does provide a different meaning for one's journey. Although people may doubt the reality of merit and demerit, they may describe pilgrimage benefits in other ways, such as being a vehicle for transformation. One man compared visiting the holy places to using a high-quality

scent: even a small amount has a pronounced effect and continues to scent the body long after one has applied it. Baba Haridas described pilgrimage as a tool to break down the ego: that just as one cleaned clothes by beating them on rocks, the journey's difficulties gradually cleansed the pilgrim. Further benefits came from having limited possessions, which helped people simplify their lives, whereas constant motion kept them from developing attachments. Other answers stressed the benefits from the "good company" of ascetics—some of whom have done decades of intense religious practice—as a catalytic agent moving people to change.

The most interesting interpretation came during a casual conversation with two men in Bikaner.[9] They were delighted to hear that I was concentrating my study on Hardwar and remarked that Hindus believe that bathing there has the power to take away sins. A moment later, one of them, who did not seem particularly educated, gave a more psychological explanation: that bathing in the Ganges in such a beautiful and peaceful place relieved one's "mental tension" (he used this English phrase in a Hindi sentence) and brought the feeling that one's sins had been washed away. This is another attempt to impart some special feeling to a place, phrased in a contemporary idiom of anxiety and relief rather than religious merit and demerit. Recent ethnomedical studies show that "tension" is itself a reinterpreted category in South Asia; it is used to describe not only mental stress and anxiety but also the personal troubles and personality disorders formerly ascribed to possession (see Parkar et al. 2003: 304; Chowdhury et al. 2001: 121; Halliburton 2005).

These explanations are all attempting to reinterpret traditional symbols and respond creatively to the perceived discrepancy between worldviews. Awareness of differing worldviews has been one major force affecting people's conceptions about pilgrimage, both to Hardwar and to other places. A second major force affecting these ideas has been the growth of tourism, which has unleashed an entirely different set of responses.

Tourism, Pilgrimage, and Development

Journeys to holy places—whether Hardwar, Jerusalem, or Chaucer's Canterbury—have always been connected with business, and no perceptive observer can ignore its economic implications. For many Indians, pleasure travel is a relatively recent idea, and its present forms clearly reflect earlier patterns. On one hand, there is the continued popularity of the hill stations, and people who go on holidays there are clearly mimicking established elite behavior (i.e., that of the British colonizers). On the other hand, the more recent notion of cultural tourism, in which people

visit sites with historical, cultural, or religious importance, seems to be a natural extension of pilgrim travel. Tourism has grown tremendously in the past twenty years, and has had a profound and sometimes pernicious effect.[10]

Tourism development has been driven by forces from the demand side (the consumers) and the supply side (the providers). In this way, it both reflects social change and has helped to drive those changes. On the demand side, domestic tourism has been stimulated by the group Pavan Varma has dubbed "The Great Indian Middle Class"—whom he excoriates as driven by greed, obsessed with consumerism, and indifferent to anything outside their limited personal concerns.[11] They are newly affluent—many as beneficiaries of the recent economic liberalization—they have gained mobility through the automobile, and they are seeking consumer pleasures that were formerly unavailable. This consumer ethos is reflected in demands for higher quality facilities, for comfort, for entertainment and diversion, and in the aversion to any hardship. The market has pursued this group with the greatest vigor—since the market's top end generates the greatest revenue—and thus this group's desires have had disproportionate weight.[12]

From the supply side, the most significant force behind tourism has been the state and union governments, since their priorities profoundly affect the economy. For the government, tourism is an industry, and although one stated goal is to preserve the country's cultural heritage, the government's primary concerns are economic—to generate employment and income.[13] Governments have promoted tourism in several ways: by developing tourist facilities, by disseminating information, and by organizing tourist events. In some cases, it develops such facilities directly—our Himalayan tour was run by the Garwhal Mandal Vikas Nigam, a government organization—but it more commonly seeks alliances with private businesses, which receive incentives to develop facilities. One recent example from Hardwar is the construction of the cable car to the Chandi Devi temple, which was built by a private company but financed by low-interest government loans (H. C. Pandey, interview 4/19/98). The trolley significantly boosted traffic not only to the Chandi Devi temple but also to the Gauri-Shankar temple, which sits next to the trolley's access point on the Najibabad road. Carefully selecting the trolley's location thus magnified its benefits to other local sites. A larger scale example comes from the Uttar Pradesh government's 1990 plan to develop the Braj region into a "heritage zone" for cultural tourism; the plan explicitly recognizes that "the 'highway tourist' has to be offered a hygienic and stimulating package." To attract such visitors, the plan called for extensive infrastructural and environmental improvements, toward which the Indian Oil Company donated one million rupees to help restore the *ghat*s on the Yamuna (Vohra 1990: 3).

The government has also promoted tourism by disseminating information through print and electronic media. For example, on Web sites such as that of the Union Government's Tourism Ministry (http://tourisminindia.com), pilgrimage sites are important tourist destinations. To attract nonresident Indians, these same bodies have run promotions such as the "Millenium Mahayatra 1999–2001" and then an "Incredible !ndia campaign (www.incredibleindia.org). Both Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) and later Uttarakhand have promoted similar state-level initiatives; U.P. tourism divided the state into six different tourism circuits, whereas the Uttarakhand government stresses adventure tourism, nature tourism, and pilgrimage. One U.P. tourism official stressed that disseminating such information was a "moral duty" to help people avoid difficulty, yet he also admitted that there were economic considerations, since one goal was to induce people to stay three days in one place, since it took this long to benefit the local economy.[14]

At times, providing information and promoting tourism clearly overlap. The U.P. government promoted eleven annual festivals scattered through its six tourism circuits, in a clear effort to attract tourist traffic (U.P. Tourism n.d.). Two of these eleven co-opted existing festivals, but the other nine were new and were scattered all through the year. The Uttarakhand government has retained the Badri-Kedar festival and the International Yoga Week in Rishikesh (although the latter is still run by U.P. Tourism), as well as Hardwar's Gangotsav (Festival of the Ganges). Current promotions on the Uttarakhand Tourism Web site stress existing regional festivals as a way to reinforce and promote local culture, but the predominant emphasis is on adventure tourism, though there is still a pronounced emphasis on pilgrimage. Such development efforts not only promote economic goals but also give governments a platform to disseminate its own messages. This is especially true for festivals such as the Kumbha Mela, which are an ideal environment to disseminate messages to large numbers of people.[15]

Successful tourism promotion requires three things: an infrastructure, a clientele, and most of all, a product. I've briefly addressed the clientele, which is not only foreigners and the great Indian middle class (who are both at the market's top end) but also other domestic tourists further down the economic scale. Government and private businesses have taken up the question of infrastructure, both to develop the necessary facilities and to organize and convey information. Two factors give pilgrimage sites a distinct advantage here: there is usually some established infrastructure, and there is already an established clientele, for whom the pilgrimage model provides a reason to visit. Further, the fact that traditional culture commends travel to these places means that many people will be attracted to them in the first place.

The product is India's cultural past, including its religious past. To put it bluntly, holiness has become one more marketable asset—to be promoted with the same gusto as beautiful natural surroundings, a splendid palace, a magnificent fort, beautiful handicrafts, or good access to shopping. Such vending is actually easier for pilgrimage spots, since they are established attractions with an existing clientele. Yet this also raises the question—to be addressed later—of whether such frequent use debases this currency, like the torn and soiled banknotes that no merchant will accept.

There are many examples of such vending—in the tourism literature of virtually any Indian state—so I cite only two here. In 1990, a private developer was building the Sadhubela apartments next door to Hardwar's Sadhubela Ashram—perhaps to serve those for whom ashram life was a little too spartan. A billboard ad described the apartments as "a holy environment in a holy place, surrounded by holy people." Buyers could select either one- or two-room flats—the latter included a *puja* room—and were urged to take advantage of the "holy enchantments and prayers outside your door." Government bodies also use this same sort of rhetoric. A newspaper ad for Hardwar's 1998 Kumbha Mela described it as "a rare opportunity for a soul-purifying experience" and later promised that "A trip to the Kumbh Mela will surely rejuvenate your mind and pacify your soul" (*Times of India*, 2/15/98: 19) The Mela's tourism officer rightly noted that people would come to the Mela even if it was not publicized, but such advertising certainly affects how people are drawn there (H. C. Pandey, interview).[16]

Pilgrim tourism reflects the interaction between these two forces, supply-side pull and the demand-side push—with providers promoting tourism as a way to make money, provide employment, and foster growth, and consumers stressing it for their own enjoyment and ease. Although my attention mainly focuses on Hardwar, these general trends apply to many other places, especially those with pilgrim economies. These effects have become manifest in two general ways: some related to the changes in Hardwar's physical environment, and others related to people's changing attitudes. I separate them here only for convenience, since they clearly influence one another, and both have profoundly affected Hardwar's general atmosphere.

The most notable physical change has been Hardwar's changing land use patterns, particularly the rise in luxury facilities. Some of these have been private homes or apartment complexes, as wealthy Delhi residents buy homes in Hardwar as a refuge from the capital's noise and pollution; according to one estimate, a quarter of Hardwar's houses are second homes.[17] Entrepreneurs have also constructed luxury hotels offering high-end amenities—air conditioning, high-class restaurants, hot running water, backup electrical power, and private car parking—and many people now expect these as a matter of course.

Given Hardwar's topographic limitations, this strong demand has fueled a sharp rise in land prices, and this has perniciously affected many Hardwar constituencies. Hardwar's "regular people" find themselves priced out of the housing market, whereas poorer visitors find fewer places geared toward serving them. Rising land values have also affected the town's commercial tone, as more and more stores selling lower-margin items (e.g., cloth or construction supplies) get displaced to the margins, since the central locations can be developed for tourism for a much greater return. The downtown's limited area means that the only way to get land for new buildings is by demolishing older ones, and this has changed the character of many neighborhoods, including my own. In 1989–90, Sharvan Nath Nagar was clearly residential, but by 1998, it had become overwhelmingly commercial, primarily hotels and lodging houses. Another example is at Vishnu Ghat, where the new *ghat*s that were built for the 1998 Kumbha Mela were immediately followed by upscale hotels just upstream. As mentioned in earlier chapters, these changing land use patterns have adversely affected both *sadhu*s and *panda*s. Increasing development and luxury construction means that poorer ascetics have fewer and fewer places to stay. A contributing factor here has been the relative decline of the established *akhara*s and an increase in ascetics presiding over their own ashrams—who become like any other landowners, with property to safeguard and interests to protect and promote. For the *panda*s, this development has weakened the traditional family model for their relationship with their clients. Many higher end clients no longer stay with their *panda*s, whose lodges often lack the amenities that visitors demand; this reduces the *panda*s to ritual brokers, to be hired as needed to perform rites.[18]

The other important shift has been what visitors seek in coming to Hardwar and how these changing desires have shifted the city's tone. This tourist clientele is quite different from traditional pilgrims, both in terms of what they want and in the restrictions they are willing to endure. In 1996, one hotel a stone's throw from Har-ki-Pairi sported a large billboard advertising its attractions, among which were a television in every room and two different movie videos daily. The hotel's clientele may be attracted by Hardwar's holiness, but it also wants entertainment. Interestingly, the hotel is owned by a *sanyasi mahant*, who clearly recognizes a good business opportunity. In other cases, hotels are alleged to fulfill their customers' desires in violation of local bylaws or traditional moral codes. Hardwar's bylaws prohibit meat, eggs, and liquor, and hotels in town must be extremely circumspect in providing these, but the outlying hotels are described as dens of iniquity—regaling their patrons with nonvegetarian food, liquor, and call girls brought in from Delhi.[19] These providers are responding to their patrons' demands and satisfying them as best they can.

This greater emphasis on entertainment and ease was visible even in summer 1996, when I noted amusement parks near Har-ki-Pairi and Kankhal's Daksha temple, replete with carnival rides, food stands, and various entertainments. These seem to be seasonal attractions, since the Har-ki-Pairi carnival was running during the summer pilgrim season in June 2005 but was long gone when I returned the following November. In the past fifteen years, the stalls surrounding the Daksha temple have shifted from selling religious books and *puja* articles to selling plastic novelty items, as the shopkeepers there seek to provide merchandise that their public will buy. Hardwar's bazaar now has several video arcades to divert bored urban children. Just south of Hardwar is a dinosaur theme park with gigantic animatronic dinosaurs, and the *Tyrannosaurus rex* was one of the most popular displays at the 1998 Kumbha Mela. Among the most recent additions are Fun Valley, a water park built on the road to Dehra Dun that offers clean, family-friendly entertainment, and a religious theme park called Gangadham.[20] Other sorts of diversions were offered by the private businesses advertising luxury tent facilities at the 1998 Kumbha Mela, which featured attractions such as restaurants, badminton courts, bonfire pits, and whitewater rafting.[21] Such emphases clearly show that they sought to attract a different sort of traveler than traditional pilgrims.

Within the city's general orbit, the combination of pilgrimage themes and tourist attractions is most clearly visible at the large new ashrams north of Har-ki-Pairi. Aside from lodging Hardwar's visitors, many have become attractions in their own right, usually because of their religious tableaux (*dharmik jhankiya*). These tableaux illustrate well-known mythic stories in various artistic media: sometimes sculptural, as at Paramarth Ashram; sometimes colored mirror mosaic, as at Pawan Dham and other places; sometimes large painted murals, as at Vaikunth Dham; and sometimes even electromechanical, as at Jayram Ashram. These scenes are arguably educational and unquestionably entertaining, but they are also clearly marketed as visitor attractions, both by being mentioned in pamphlet guidebooks and through direct advertising on billboards and in mass media. Many of these places earn money through modest admission fees and through their bookstores or gift shops, and there is always the chance that a visitor may make a donation to the trust.

This trend's fullest flowering is the Bharat Mata Mandir (Mother India Temple), an eight-story building said to be Hardwar's tallest structure.[22] The temple was inaugurated in 1983, and each floor has a theme emphasizing India's religious and national identity. The ground floor's primary feature is an enormous map of India, marked with important religious and historical sites, while the next three stories are devoted to the people who have served Mother India: the "heroes on the battlefront," against both the Mughuls and the British;

the "woman of noble character at home," and finally the philosophers and saints (Giri 1986: 14) The fourth floor is an assembly hall that displays plaques with inspirational quotes from many religious traditions, and the top three floors are devoted to images of the Goddess, Vishnu, and at the apex, Shiva.

The guidebook admits that "it may appear that there are too many manifestations of Deities and Nobility under one roof" but then assures visitors that each shrine has been consecrated by the Dwaraka Shankaracharya and that the images are worshipped with appropriate rituals (Giri 1986: 14). It is extremely popular—during my initial fieldwork in 1989–90, some people described it as Hardwar's nicest temple, precisely because it was so "modern"—but it didn't really do much for me. With its ten-rupee admission charge and its plethora of exhibits and display cases, it felt more like a museum than a temple, and the temple's founder notes in its guidebook that one of his motives for building it was to educate the younger generation about "the supreme examples of our heritage," so that they could "evaluate our culture, our elegance, our sense of values and our traditions" (Giri 1986: iii). It wasn't until several years later that I realized that a much more powerful force lay beneath the temple's construction, one that has profoundly affected Hardwar pilgrimage: politics.

Pilgrimage and Politics

The Parliamentary elections in November 1989—mere months after I arrived in Hardwar—marked a sea change in Indian politics.[23] The Bharatiya Janata Party ("Indian People's Party," hereafter BJP) saw its parliamentary delegation jump from a mere two members to eighty-six, and since then it has been a fixture in the Indian political landscape. The BJP and its predecessor, the Jana Sangh, both originated as the political arm of the "Sangh family," a loosely connected group of organizations whose parent is the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh ("National Volunteer Corps," hereafter RSS).

The RSS is an unabashedly elitist organization, whose self-proclaimed mission is to produce the leaders for a renascent Hindu India. It espouses Hindu nationalist ideas first articulated by V. D. Savarkar, whose central thesis was that the Hindus were a nation, despite their linguistic, social, and regional differences (Andersen and Damle 1987: 33). For Savarkar, a Hindu was anyone regarding India as fatherland and holy land, and these criteria define Hindu identity on cultural rather than religious grounds—that Hindus are a people united by a common cultural heritage. Throughout its history, the RSS has shunned overt political activity but has exercised considerable influence by sponsoring affiliated organizations—from trade unions to charitable societies

to student organizations to political parties—for which it has provided the leadership (Andersen and Damle 1987: 108–44). Aside from the BJP, the most important affiliate during the 1989 political earthquake was the Vishva Hindu Parishad ("World Hindu Organization," hereafter VHP), an RSS affiliate whose mandate has been more explicitly focused on religious issues.

One reason for the BJP's early success was an anti-incumbency wave against the Congress party which was demonized as decadent, corrupt, and more interested in maintaining its power than in responsible governance. A far more significant factor was the way in which the VHP and BJP were able to mobilize and market a "Hindu" political identity, through a series of highly publicized campaigns. These campaigns were coupled with the warning that Hindu identity was endangered—partly by "alien" religions such as Islam and Christianity, which seek to increase their membership through conversion, but also because the Congress government's preferential treatment of minorities (especially Muslims) had made Hindus second-class citizens in their "own" country.[24] Beginning in 1989, the clarion call was for Hindus to shake off their complacency and tolerance, unite as a political body, and take back "their" country.[25] The most important symbol of this empowerment and renewal was the struggle to build the Ram Janam Bhumi ("Rama's Birthplace") temple in Ayodhya, on the site formerly occupied by the Babri Masjid.[26]

Hardwar's sociopolitical climate was extremely favorable to Hindu nationalist sentiments. As a Hindu pilgrimage site, it is rooted in notions of Hindu identity, and many residents hold traditional and very conservative Hindu values. At its most benign, Hindutva is presented as a simple majoritarian argument: 85 percent of India's population is Hindu, and therefore India is a Hindu nation. This claim's darker undercurrent projects Hindu culture and values as India's sole cultural foundation and explicitly rejects the "composite culture" notion—the idea that Indian culture sprang from a variety of sources—which was one of Nehru's fundamental assumptions. Many Hardwar residents bear no ill will toward other religious communities, but they supported the BJP because they wanted a government that they felt stood up for them and their values. Hardwar's voters consistently elected BJP candidates during the 1990s, although that pattern has now declined—as voters' priorities have shifted from "values" to governance, as the BJP has faced its own anti-incumbency wave, and as local conflicts in Hardwar have been refracted through the prism of national politics.[27]

Hardwar has also been politically important in its own right. Its proximity to Delhi makes it a visible place to launch a political campaign, going back to Indira Gandhi (McKean 1996: 43). During the past fifteen years, the VHP has held numerous rallies and meetings in Hardwar, partly because it is such a

visible place and partly because sympathetic local religious leaders—some of whom are VHP heavyweights—can help out with logistical arrangements. Lise McKean's *Divine Enterprise* carefully traces the connections between Hardwar-area gurus and the Hindu nationalist movement, particularly Swami Satyamitrananda Giri, the Bharat Mata Mandir's founder (McKean 1996: chapters 5–6). Chapter 6 discusses how the temple's exhibits both reveal and promote Hindu nationalist ideas—which is so clearly true that as soon as I read it, I chided myself for missing such an obvious point. She notes that the temple "purveys to visitors a particular configuration of national identity" and "encourages visitors to imagine their identities as devoted sons and daughters of Bharat Mata, . . . and to prove their devotion by dedicating themselves . . . to the defense of the holy motherland" (p. 163). Chapter 5 describes the swami's successful fund-raising—particularly from the Gujarati community, which is wealthy, religious, and conservative. The book's tone suggests disapproval, yet in the end, the swami seems guilty of nothing more than holding conservative Hindu values and being a successful fund-raiser. The latter may clash with idealized images of renunciants, but most Hindus don't have a problem with it. Further, my own interactions with him and the regard in which he is held by people whose judgment I respect have convinced me that he is not a dangerous man, although we might disagree on certain issues. Indeed, he is exercising his democratic right to promote some ideas and to oppose others, and I am sure that many people in Hardwar would agree with him.

This Hindu nationalist upsurge also helps to explain Hardwar's *kanvar* festival. The festival's growth and development in the 1980s not only coincides with the rise of Hindutva but also shows several characteristic traits. One way that Hindu nationalism sought to achieve its goals was by sponsoring large public rites, one of whose functions was to assert "Hindu" control over India's public space. Such rites have usually used readily accessible symbols such as the Ganges, which do not invoke sectarian loyalties. Many VHP-sponsored rites require little or no formal training, which means that people can participate on their own. In some cases, these rites have co-opted established festivals, which not only ensures larger crowds but also allows all the visitors to be claimed as supporters.[28] In other cases, as with Hardwar's first annual Ganapati Mela in 1990—and I believe for the *kanvar* festival as well—festivals have been transplanted from other places as a way to generate crowds and to assert control over the public space.

One finds these qualities in the VHP's first successful campaign, in which two vans converted into mobile temples crisscrossed South India's Tamil Nadu state. These temples were intended to counter caste discrimination, by allowing low-caste people (who were often barred from established temples) to bathe

the images inside.[29] Another example was the 1983 Ekatmata Yajna ("Sacrifice for Unity"), in which three caravans carrying Ganges water traversed the length and breadth of the subcontinent, converging in the middle of their journey in Nagpur, site of the RSS headquarters. During the trip, Ganges water was mixed with water from local rivers, graphically symbolizing the country's unity, and people were given the opportunity to participate by buying vials of this water, at ten rupees each. These same features can be discerned in the various campaigns to "liberate" various sacred sites, from worshipping bricks for the Ram Janam Bhumi temple and carrying them in procession to Ayodhya, to carrying pots of Ganges water for the *jalabhisek* ("lustration") at the Vishvanath temple in Benares.[30]

Even a cursory look at other *kanvar* festivals shows that they have been promoted for underlying purposes. In some cases, this motive was economic: Morinis speculates that Tarakeshvar's *kanvar* festival was to gain Marwari patronage, and the festival is still known as the Marwari *mela* ("festival," Chakrabarti 1974: 106). The case is even clearer in Mauritius, where the organizers seem to have had two motives: to affirm Hindu identity in an alien place where most Hindus were indentured agricultural laborers, and to sanctify this new environment. In 1897, a temple *pujari* dreamed that the waters of Grand Bassin Lake sprang from the Ganges, and the next year nine pilgrims went there to carry water for Shivaratri. As Cascaro and Zimmerman note, "Fait etonnant, il ne s'agissait pas d'une manifestation populaire, mais d'une demarche de la part de personnes de haute caste, decidees de redonner dignite et identite a tout un peuple" ["It is noteworthy that this (festival) did not arise as a grassroots movement but as a strategy by high-caste individuals determined to restore dignity and identity to all the people"] (1987: 218).

Hardwar's Shravan *kanvar* festival neatly fits the larger Hindu nationalist pattern. As a public rite generating large crowds, it clearly demonstrates a Hindu presence and identity as those crowds travel. It is also decentralized, with each pilgrim doing simple ritual actions requiring no formal training. This realization cast a different light on the festival's lack of textual attestation and the pilgrims' constant refrain that one should do what one thought appropriate. If this inference is correct, the ultimate goal of this festival was to generate a crowd—the bigger, the better. Another point of convergence was the age of the *kanvar seva sangh*s, whose genesis coincided exactly with this more militant brand of Hindu nationalism. All these factors led me to wonder if Hindu nationalist groups had established and promoted this rite.

These suspicions were supported by evidence gained during a visit to Hardwar in summer 1996. The clearest confirmation came from a local journalist, who categorically stated that the *kanvar* pilgrimage had been transplanted

from Vaidyanath and was being promoted by the "Sangh Parivar" (a collective name for the RSS and its affiliates) as a Hindu *jagaran* ("awakening") to demonstrate Hindu identity.[31] Yet even without his testimony, the Sangh presence was clear—which is hardly surprising, since Hardwar was already a BJP stronghold. Many *kanvar* service organizations were sponsored by Hindu nationalist groups such as the Shiv Sena or the Bajrang Dal, and RSS volunteers managed crowd control on the climactic day at Meerut district's Pura Mahadev temple. Another clear sign was the pilgrim groups carrying flags and banners proclaiming a Sangh affiliation, and these groups tended to march together in an almost martial array, whereas village groups typically fragment en route.

The clearest attempt to shape public opinion was an elaborate styrofoam *kanvar* sculpted into a scale model of Gujarat's Somnath temple. Large crowds came to see it the night it was on view in Hardwar, and these same qualities would have drawn considerable attention on the road to Pura Mahadev.[32] This was the second year for such a display, and the previous year's sculpture had been Ayodhya's proposed Ram Janam Bhumi temple. Both temples symbolize Hindus' past oppression and present empowerment, and publicly invoking these symbols—while the teams of men carry them on the pilgrimage route—is neither unintended nor accidental.[33] Such displays assert and reinforce a visible "Hindu" presence, and this could generate significant tension along the way, since the pilgrimage route passes through regions with substantial Muslim populations.[34]

All of these indications point to a clear Sangh presence, though it would be silly to claim that Hindu nationalist elements somehow remote-control this festival. In fact, most of these pilgrims are under no control but their own, and 700,000 transient men—whom many Hardwar residents disparage as rustic villagers—can cause tremendous disruption.[35] The Sangh's influence has been more indirect—promoting a mass-based public rite, establishing the necessary infrastructure (the *kanvar seva sangh*s), and channeling people to sites such as Pura Mahadev temple, which has a very limited history of Shravan celebrations and no prior importance as a pilgrimage site. Is it merely coincidence that RSS volunteers manage the crowds on the festival day or that the route to Pura Mahadev passes through densely settled Muslim areas?[36] At the very least, the crowds and publicity from this event could be cited as evidence for a revitalized Hindu identity, regardless of whether the individuals supported that identity.[37] I vividly recall my confusion at a VHP rally at Hardwar in 1990—many of the buses had such vitriolic anti-Muslim signs that it made me sick to read them, but the bus passengers themselves seemed like typical Indian youths. That incident made me realize that the crowd could be claimed as supporters for the rally but that there were other possible explanations to explain their presence—for

example, that a local Sangh organization had hired a bus and offered local men a free day trip to Hardwar. Yet even though many of these young men may be sympathetic to the Sangh's message, in the end they come for their own reasons, as is discussed in the final section.

The rise of Hindu nationalism in the past two decades has significantly affected Hardwar, since this nationalism is naturally compatible with Hardwar's prevailing environment—Hindu, religious, and conservative. This same environment has meant that Hindu nationalist elements have a continued presence—the VHP and the Shiv Sena have strong local chapters and a visible presence at festivals such as the Kumbha Mela—even as Hindutva's power has waned in the larger society. The mass politics were strongest in the early 1990s, when the BJP was promoting Hindutva as a strategy to unite Hindus and to gain power. Since 1997, these once-unified groups (BJP, VHP, RSS) have sometimes worked at cross-purposes, given the BJP's strategic decision to embrace coalition politics and to de-emphasize Hindutva themes in order to gain power at the national level. The responsibility to deliver good government has meant that the BJP has ultimately been judged by its results, and to many people's distress, the "party with a difference"—supposedly disciplined, simple-living, and ideologically motivated—has shown itself little different from the "corrupt" Congress when it comes to enjoying the perquisites of power. Although still a powerful force, at the moment its political fortunes seem to be waning.

In summary, Hindu pilgrimage and pilgrimage sites have been profoundly affected by the social forces at work in modern Indian society: the effects of education and modern ideas, the promotion of tourism and leisure culture, and the political groundswell generated by the growth of Hindu nationalism. These forces create different and sometime conflicting images of these places, and this has slowly but inexorably changed the way that many people think about them. The concluding section examines the effects of these changes, evaluates some Hindu reactions to them, and concludes with some reflections about pilgrimage in the modern world.

Holiness, Mundaneness, and Meaning

Based on my Himalayan bus tour, it seems clear that tourist development efforts have successfully attracted people who would not otherwise have considered coming to the Himalayas. Yet such efforts have their inevitable consequences, both in their effects on the places themselves and in how visitors conceive of them. As a fellow traveler in Gangotri remarked, the government was interested in promoting tourism to raise revenue, but this meant an

increase in visitor traffic, as well as developing the infrastructure to handle it, which risked diminishing what had made the site attractive in the first place. Places such as Gangotri and Uttarkashi are clearly showing the ill effects of overdevelopment: deforestation, pollution, and environmental degradation.[38] These same forces are affecting the Braj region but happily not without protest (Sullivan 1996: 465–71). Hardwar is larger than the hill sites and a little better able to withstand these shocks, but the city's general quality of life has clearly taken a turn for the worse, and I suspect that the construction and economic patterns will only increase.

I heard rumblings of dissatisfaction as early as 1990, when one of Hardwar's oldest and most respected *panda*s lamented that as Hardwar city had grown larger and larger, the *tirtha* had grown smaller and smaller, as well as in a Meerut farmer's biting comment that the degradation had begun in 1973 with the Bharat Heavy Electricals Factory, which brought in "American-style" capitalism.[39] Such remarks became more frequent later in the 1990s, as the construction boom intensified this tourist atmosphere. One friend described Hardwar as a "picnic spot" for vacationers who couldn't afford to go to Mussourie. Another fifty-year visitor described the biggest difference as the change in people's mood. He said that although some people still came for religious reasons, most came for tourism, honeymoons, and vacations, since this was the closest hill station to Delhi, and that this changed mood had diminished the atmosphere. Such sadness is the response of people who feel helpless, swept along by a wave of change that they cannot arrest and refuse to ride for its benefits.

Needless to say, the physical, social, and attitudinal changes affecting Hardwar are also found in other places and evince the same horror and dismay. Writing about Vrindavan in 1990, M. L. Varadpande excoriates the changes caused by transforming *tirtha*s into tourist centers: *pandas* change from ritual guides and virtual family members into tourist touts, guiding visitors to the temples and shops with the best commissions. In the same way, temples are transformed into historical architecture, images of deities become art objects, the holy bath becomes a cooling dip, and Vrindavan's *ras lila* is transformed into a theatrical production for tourist enjoyment. As another sign of this decline, he laments Vrindavan's plethora of "Research Institutes," at which "Krishna is not worshipped, but investigated." For Varadpande, Vrindavan's current state is merely one example of this process, and he sees it as a symptom of a more pervasive degeneration in Hindu religious life (1990: 12).[40]

These assertions contain some truth. None would dispute that India has changed greatly in the past fifty years and that these changes have affected both the *tirtha*s and people's ideas about them.[41] Although I am at times dismayed by some of these changes, I cannot patronize Hindus for "losing their heritage"

in the quest for material goods, since most of them simply want a life more like mine—at least in terms of material comforts. At another level, the lament that the world is going to hell is a common response to social change, and I suspect that much of this disapproval is driven by nostalgia, based on an idealized vision of the past as a time when the grass was greener, the sun shone brighter, and everything was clearly better. Varadpande clearly reveals this nostalgic quality when he writes that the greatest loss arising from this shift toward tourism has been the changing quality of the pilgrim journey itself: "Yatra [pilgrim travel] is undertaken on foot, people move from place to place traversing difficult terrain, snow-clad mountains, turbulent rivers. By providing all sorts of facilities the romance of Yatra is taken away" (1990: 12).

This idealized view of pilgrimage is very similar to the Sanskrit pilgrimage manuals, in which the spiritual rewards come as a result of the austerities suffered on the way. This view is romantic at heart, as the phrase "the romance of Yatra" clearly shows. A closer look at Hardwar's history highlights the difference between this idealized vision and real people's actual journeys. As but one example, consider the effect of the railroad on Hardwar pilgrimage. Ten years after its arrival—and nearly a century before Varadpande's editorial—train travel had become so integral to Hardwar pilgrimage that the British could effectively shut down festivals merely by suspending train booking. In the same way, many Himalayan pilgrim routes were initially defined by the bridges spanning rivers in various places. Despite Varadpande's claims about the nature of the pilgrim journey, neither group seems to have been especially eager to "traverse difficult terrain"—at least when there were other alternatives! Would Varadpande assert that using these "facilities" disqualified these earlier travelers as pilgrims? And whence comes his authority to pass such sweeping judgments about other people, without considering their intentions and states of mind?

In fact, such nostalgia is nothing new. In his 1904 history of Hardwar—an era contemporary people would surely consider a better time—Mulchand's conclusion begins by lamenting that people in his time had become atheistic and that the age had become corrupt (1904: 107). Based on this, one can legitimately wonder whether such nostalgia ever reflected reality, despite its persistence in popular imagination. This disjunction between image and reality goes even further back than bridges and railroads. Two centuries ago, Hardwar's Baisakhi Fair stressed both commerce and religion, and many visitors seem to have seen no conflict between these.[42] The fair's general atmosphere was far from saintly, as chapter 3's tales of fraud, theft, robbery, prostitution, and assault bear eloquent witness. It also drew non-Hindu visitors who came solely to view the spectacle. Such concrete examples raise doubts that this idealized pilgrimage pattern was ever prevalent, at least in Hardwar.

This does not deny the inevitable effects of genuine changes. Better transportation makes it easier for people to visit more frequently, sometimes even on the spur of the moment. More frequent visits and easier travel have undoubtedly decreased people's anticipation—which in earlier times would have slowly built as they moved toward a place they had never been and probably would never see again. Easier transportation has made pilgrim visits less stressful but has also changed the way people think about these visits. Yet it seems clear that present attitudes have a past history, and the changes in people's ideas also include constructive and creative responses to these changing circumstances.

These creative responses also have a long history, as the *mahatmya* literature and early printed pamphlets clearly show.[43] A *mahatmya* has two general goals: to promote a site's holiness and to channel pilgrim traffic to some places rather than others. These are clearly evident in the *Mayapurimahatmya*, which was probably composed as the annual Baisakhi fair was becoming an important marketplace. One telling incident in this text describes how a *shudra* wagon driver named Shamvuka attained final release (*moksha*) by dying in Hardwar, even though he had come there only for business (MPM 9.4–10). This brief story addresses a troubling contemporary problem, the "incompatibility" between pilgrimage and trade. The message in the text not only validates such multipurpose travel but also ends by stating that if a low-born person like Shamvuka could gain these religious benefits, how much more so a pious person, who had come for religious reasons? The *mahatmya* immediately follows this story with a list of auspicious times, including the Baisakhi fair and the Kumbha Mela.

Three early pamphlets—which were made possible by the printing press and which were addressing the changing travel patterns caused by the railroad—show similar blends of promotion and interpretation. These pamphlets describe Hardwar's sacred sites, recount their charter myths and spiritual benefits, and sometimes even give ritual instruction, such as how to do a Ganges bath. Mulchand's 1904 *Haridvar ki Itihas* ("History of Hardwar") is the only one with no clear agenda; he claims to have written it to counter contemporary atheism by reminding his readers of their past. Shiv Chandra Vaidya's *Haridvara Tirtha Darshana* ("View of Hardwar," 1907) and Tarachand Sharma's *Shri Haridvar Darpana* ("Mirror of Holy Hardwar," 1908) both show much clearer vested interests. The former promoted the author's ayurvedic dispensary and college, whereas the latter solicited donations for an organization seeking to develop Hardwar's civic amenities. The latter author was also promoting a strategic development plan to make Hardwar more attractive, which could potentially increase both traffic and patronage. Since he owned a large

piece of land very close to Har-ki-Pairi, this would have brought him significant personal benefits.

Both the *mahatmyas* and the pamphlets were trying to respond creatively to a new situation. Although more difficult to tease out, one can find contemporary creative responses to social change beyond simply following the market to its lowest level. Contemporary faith will reflect a contemporary worldview, and thus things may be phrased differently than before. As mentioned earlier, many people have problems with a mechanistic understanding of ritual action ("do this, get that"), which may have been less problematic in earlier times. This has been evident for several generations, since P. V. Kane noted, "The number of people visiting holy places in the belief of accumulating merit is sure to become less and less, as modern secular education spreads," although he describes stopping pilgrimage altogether as a "calamity" (HOD 4.826). His own solution is to change the motive for pilgrimage from traditional religious sentiments to cultural pride, since, he exhorts, "Every Indian who is proud of the great religious and spiritual heritage of our country must make it a point to devote some part of his time to frequenting holy mountains, rivers, and other places of pilgrimage" (HOD 4.827).[44]

Another response comes from K. S. Fonia, a Garhwal native and former state tourism minister for Uttarakhand. In comparing past and present, Fonia admits the obvious—that Himalayan pilgrimage used to be much more difficult:

> The guideline in olden days was that "Greater the Tribulation, Higher the degree of Salvation." Yes, it was this faith that made the yatra to Uttarakhand most rewarding—and a sure means of salvation. The tribulations in Uttarakhand yatra were many. Pilgrims had to trek their way straight from Rishikesh. It took them months to complete the full circuit. Pilgrims would be mostly in the later half of their life, and many of them would take the calculated risk of not returning home.... In the olden days when means were not available, pilgrimage was actually painstaking and nothing short of penance. (1987: 16)

Whereas Varadpande is nostalgic for that more difficult past, Fonia confidently asserts that our era is much better, since modern transportation and facilities have made the Himalayan shrines so easily accessible. These changing circumstances have also prompted him to propound a new ethos for pilgrimage:

> The ancient belief... no longer holds good, and it is no longer relevant to subject oneself to [the] tribulations, hardships, and

> penances of the olden days. The presence of God can better be felt with a healthy body and a healthy mind. What is important is faith.... With prosperous social system and the facilities at hand, faith in Uttarakhand shrines is growing stronger and stronger. Hence the old proverbial saying can safely be replaced by "Greater the adoration, higher the degree of salvation." (1987: 17)

Some people might recoil at his suggestion, but Fonia is more honest than many. He is not only recognizing the changing material circumstances for Himalayan pilgrimage but also proposing an understanding that gives value and meaning to contemporary practice. He has also used the "f-word" (faith), which historians and scholars of religion often find hard to mention—perhaps because it cannot be measured or quantified, much like the notion of religious merit.

We have already seen that people come with radically different understandings of their journey. Less sophisticated people may adhere to seemingly unchanged traditional understandings, whereas others form new interpretations for existing practices. Perhaps this is why so many people said that they came to Hardwar for "peace" (*shant*)—whether a physical escape from a noisy and crowded city or the spiritual serenity found sitting by the Ganges. Yet in either case, the pilgrims are finding something vital—whether they are getting rid of their sins or relieving their mental tensions.

Although most Hardwar visitors have some sort of religious feeling, this does not exhaust their possible motives, and this is probably little different from earlier eras. Pilgrimage provides a religiously sanctioned opportunity to travel the world and visit new places. Pilgrimage has been especially important for Hindu women, whose travel opportunities have traditionally been extremely limited, since both texts and tradition emphatically state that a married man must travel with his wife. The pilgrimage texts present an austere ideal, but it is naive to believe that past pilgrims subscribed to this in toto, and one can even read this literature's frequent injunctions as seeking to tighten up people's lax practice by reminding them of what they should be doing. Just one example of such lax practice is Hardwar's nineteenth-century pilgrim businessmen, whom these traditional texts would have condemned in no uncertain terms.

This does not pretend that all the visitors are pilgrims, and some would claim that very few of them are. The biggest complaint from many people who care about Hardwar as a sacred site is that too many visitors are treating Hardwar as if it was an ordinary place, rather than giving it the respect it deserves. Murlidhar Sharma, whose family owns Bhim Ghoda, said that a few visitors still knew how to behave at a *tirtha*, but the rest blindly followed the crowd and

created a mess (*gandagi phailana*).[45] Unlike many others, this did not seem to upset him. He said that the people doing good would become good, that the ones doing evil would become evil, and that the real task for each person was not to condemn others, but to improve oneself.

There also remains a deep-seated conviction that these places possess the potential for human transformation, if only people would apply themselves. This message was on some small signs posted at the bathing places, warning that people would gain no benefits from the *tirtha* until they had reformed their lives. Once one is open to this power and ready to commit to it, transformation can begin to happen. In stressing this point, Amarnath quoted a well-known Hindi saying, "if one's heart is pure, the Ganges is in the *kathauti*" *(man canga to kathauti me ganga)*. He further explained that a *kathauti* was the water pot in which cobblers soak leather to make it pliable for working—water that is rendered immediately impure by the leather (since it comes from a dead animal) and becomes browner and cloudier throughout the workday. Yet for someone pure of heart, this murky water is the holy Ganges.[46] The call here is for people to generate feelings of their own and to take part in the process. This is the difference between a trip to Mansa Devi in the cable car and a walk up the mountain on foot; the latter, as one man said, "generates more feelings."

In the end, the trip means something different to each person, and a major factor behind such meaning is the religious quality of their lives, since two people may perform the same action but think of it in very different ways.[47] Some people have more overtly religious motives for their journey, because some people lead more overtly religious lives, and it would be surprising if their journey did not mirror this. It is unrealistic to expect people to don new personae at the beginning of a "pilgrimage," since their overall attitude toward their journey ultimately stems from their personal convictions.

I would contend that the ultimate purpose of the pilgrimage manuals was not to promote slavish and mechanical adherence to rules but to encourage this sense of participation. Lakshmidhara's *Tirthavivecanakhanda* (twelfth century C.E.) begins with injunctions describing how one should conduct one's pilgrimage and only then goes on to describe the sites and their benefits. This emotional commitment and sense of involvement is why a person with faith gets the religious benefits of a *tirtha*, while another just gets another bath. This was one of the themes that Amarnath stressed to me again and again: he often remarked that the Ganges could not purify one from sin, although it could clean one's body, yet invariably he followed this by observing how people, "because of their faith," were always bathing in the Ganges. He made a similar point about the benefit of ritual actions such as *vrats*, rhetorically asking how people's actions could compel God to do something—since God was perfect,

complete, and needed nothing—and affirming that the real reason *vrat*s had any power was that performing them was pleasing to God.

This is clearly true for many of the *kanvar* carriers who bring Ganges water back to their own villages. They are largely village people—I was the first foreigner some of them had ever talked to—and their simplicity, directness, and warmth make them both authentic and endearing. None of them mentioned anything about Hindu nationalism, but instead they talked about their own personal needs—either seeking God's grace, sharing time with their friends, or rendering thanks for benefits received. Even if political forces lie behind the festival's promotion, individual motives impel individuals to take up and carry a *kanvar*. At this individual level, the festival's appeal—as with the better known Santoshi Ma *vrat*—undoubtedly reflects the stresses of modern Indian life, where competition and corruption make it difficult to attain one's goals. In such a harsh context, seeking divine favor is not only an appeal to an incorruptible authority but also an act of empowerment and hope.

So the real meaning of these journeys lies in people's individual experiences, in the depth of meaning with which they invest them. As a conclusion, this seems unsatisfactory: it generates no model, provides no standard, and seems almost banal. Putting the meaning of an experience on individuals also raises other sorts of problems. Since we may be unsure about how to interpret our own experience, it seems much more problematic to interpret what things mean to others, particularly across cultural or temporal boundaries. Here I must admit that I can give no defense, other than to say that this is exactly what meaning is; it's not something that one finds out there waiting to be catalogued, but an idea that is abstract and constructed. People certainly categorize their experience by using culturally mediated categories, but at the end of the day, each person's experience is his or her own, and each person interprets it in his or her own way.

In the end, I cannot say what these experiences meant to other people, but I can point to my own epiphanies over the past twenty years: the continual soothing presence of the Ganges, whose rushing waters wash clean the mind's sorrows and defiling tensions; the majesty of Hardwar's evening *arati*, which invariably evokes feelings of reverence and awe; the many sincere people who have honestly given me their thoughts and opinions and the many kind people who have shown me hospitality as a guest in their country; the transcendent moment in 1990 when I rounded the final ridge and caught the first glimpse of the Kedarnath temple ahead; and finally, the differing demeanors between people ascending to and descending from those shrines. Ascending pilgrims look tired and drained; descending ones have a radiance that cannot be easily dismissed. I have seen this in the faces of the *sadhu*s traveling through the

Himalayas, and in the pilgrim crowds during seven visits to Kedarnath, and coming down from Kedarnath, people must have seen something in mine, for I have been astounded by their response. Holiness, after all, is not something that exists in things but something that is ascribed to things. Hardwar, the Himalayas, and all of India's *tirtha*s can never escape from the forces of development and change, but these cannot destroy their sanctity, for their real power does not rest in the land, but in the hearts of those who visit.

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Appendix I: Text of the Inscription at the Sharvan Nath Temple, Hardwar

This inscription was clearly written as panegyric for the *sanyasi mahant* Sharvan Nath. It refers to significant gifts and patronage, as well as a royal audience during the temple's dedication. One problem with the inscription's veracity is that Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah Deva, the king of Nepal, died in 1816, four years before the temple dedication. If this is the "Vir Vikram Yudh Singh" referred to in the inscription, this is clearly an anachronism.

On Thursday, on the fifth day of Magh's bright half, *samvat* 1876 [20 January 1820], on the auspicious occasion of the Kumbha [Mela], Shri Sharvan Nath, the great king, the consummate yogi, consecrated the images of Mahadeva (Shiva) and Ganga in the temple he had built, and sponsored a festival culminating in a feast (*bhandara*), all to obtain God's blessing.

He gave the [each of the] *tirtha* brahmins five plates, bowls, and spoons, he sponsored a feast in which he spent 100,000 rupees; he also gave to petitioners an elephant, five horses, five pashmina shawls, and ten golden bracelets. Also present were Nath Ram Shatrudhari, the Jat ruler of Mewa, Ral Singh, the ruler of Bikaner Sona Jawan Singh, the ruler of Udaipur, Vir Vikram Yudh Singh, the ruler of Nepal, who delights in serving the saints, and whose majesty of presence [inspires] trembling, the Honorable Bhim Sen Thapa, and Colonel Randhir Singh, and Colonel Thapa.

Appendix II: Exhortations and Warnings for Pilgrims from the Tirtha Welfare League

Note this document's dual emphases: first and foremost to maintain and promote an appropriate religious atmosphere in Hardwar, and then to keep travelers safe from the rogues who prey on the trusting and the unwary. This was copied from a sign posted at Har-ki-Pairi on 28 August, 1990, and I have seen similar sorts of rules on painted signs at Pushkar. I do not know anything about the Tirtha Welfare League but strongly suspect that this is some subset of Hardwar's *panda*s. The fourth item on the list emphasizes the need to visit one's *panda* for a successful pilgrimage, and the concern to maintain Hardwar's purity fits perfectly with their collective ethos.

Essential Pilgrim Information

The Tirtha Welfare League warmly welcomes you to Hardwar. Pilgrims should pay attention [to this] essential information:

1. Pilgrims should kindly observe the religious precepts, to create and protect the purity of Hardwar and Mother Ganges.
2. Do not strew filth at Har-ki-Pairi, Kushavarta, or other holy places.
3. Washing clothes or dishes on the *ghat*s by the Holy Ganges violates religious precepts, as does using soap or oil [when bathing], spitting, and water play.

4. To successfully complete your pilgrimage, you should meet with your hereditary pilgrim guide (*pandaji*), from whom you can find the history of your lineage.
5. Beware of pickpockets and bag-lifters. Guard your valuables carefully. Do not trust any unknown person.
6. Do not eat cut fruit, unprotected sweets, or other such [potentially contaminated] things. Eat only pure and fresh food, and drink water only from the tap.
7. During the pilgrimage, pay special attention to your children, ladies, and elderly; make sure that they have a piece of paper bearing your name and address.
8. Intoxicants are forbidden in the Hardwar area. Please refrain from the sin of drinking liquor, [using] any other intoxicant, gambling, and other immoral acts.
9. Do not accept *prasad* or any other edible thing from an unknown person.
10. Pilgrims going to Badrinath, Kedarnath and [other parts of] Uttarakhand should take care to bring their own medicines, digestive powders, lemons, and so forth with them.
11. Anyone encountering any sort of trouble should immediately seek help from voluntary service organizations or the local government.

Please help us keep the Ganges pure.
Published by the Tirtha Welfare League, Hardwar.

Glossary

AKALI ("TIMELESS" OR "DEATHLESS") A name given to a group of Khalsa Sikhs who demanded a place in the marching order during the 1891 and 1903 Kumbha Melas.

AKHARA This word literally means a "wrestling ground" but in Hardwar's context carries the meaning of a "regiment" (that is, the people associated with the wrestling ground). The *akhara*s are organized groups of martial ascetics who in earlier times worked as traders and mercenary soldiers. Thirteen ascetic *akhara*s march in the Kumbha Mela processions. Seven of these are Shaiva (the Niranjani, Mahanirvani, Juna, Atal, Anand, Agni, and Avahana *akhara*s), three are Vaishnava (the Digambara, Nirmohi, and Nirvani), two are Udasis, and the Nirmala Akhara is historically rooted in the Sikh community.

ASTHIVISARJANA ("SCATTERING THE BONES") The final rite for a deceased person, in which bits of bone and ash from the cremation pyre are placed in a body of water, ideally the Ganges. Hardwar is a major regional center for this rite.

BAHI ("ACCOUNT BOOK") A ledger book in which the *panda*s (pilgrim guides) record the details of their clients' visits: names, family news, dates, and rites performed. Pilgrim families have a hereditary relationship with their *panda*, and these records are the definitive evidence that a person is one's genuine *panda*.

BAIRAGI (VARIANT FORM VAIRAGI, "DISPASSIONATE") Ascetic community devoted to the worship of Vishnu. Most *bairagis* worship Rama and Sita, but a small percentage worship Krishna and Radha. In Hardwar, *bairagis* have historically been less powerful and had a lower profile than the *sanyasis*.

BHAIRAV AKHARA A temple to Bhairava (a wrathful manifestation of Shiva who is often seen as the guardian of a pilgrimage place) that is controlled by the Juna *akhara*. Along with the Maya Devi and Narayani Shila temples, this is probably one of the three oldest sites in Hardwar.

BHIM GHODA A temple and bathing place just north of Har-ki-Pairi (less than a ten-minute walk). According to the local charter myth, the pond appeared when the *Mahabharata* hero Bhima pressed down on the ground with his knee. Though historical sources describe this as an important site, its importance faded in the twentieth century.

BRAHMAKUND ("POOL OF BRAHMA") The most sacred part of the bathing place at Har-ki-Pairi. Brahmakund is a hollow eddy in the bathing current surrounded by several temples.

BRAHMANA The second-oldest strand of text in the Vedas, the most authoritative Hindu religious texts. In general, the Brahmanas were preceded by the *samhitas*, or Vedic hymns, and succeeded by the more speculative Aranyakas and Upanishads. The Brahmanas' primary focus is to provide precise instructions for elaborate ritual sacrifices, but they also contain narrative and speculative material that foreshadow later religious developments.

DARSHAN ("SEEING") The interactive act of worship in which a devotee "views" the image of a deity, and the deity is simultaneously seen as viewing the devotee, since sanctified images are considered both conscious and "living." The word *darshan* can be used by extension for viewing any holy thing (e.g., an ascetic teacher, the Ganges) and, facetiously, for seeing anyone or anything.

GHAT Bathing place built of stone or masonry by the side of a river, which usually combines a flat patio-type area near the water's edge (for sitting, resting, or using before and after bathing), with a series of steps leading down into the water.

HAR-KI-PAIRI ("VISHNU'S FOOTSTEPS") A bathing-place on the Ganges that is Hardwar's most important sacred site. The name reflects the belief that Vishnu's footprints are imprinted on a rock in one of the temples there.

JUNA *AKHARA* One of the seven Shaiva *akharas*—the "regiments" of militant ascetics who in earlier times were mercenary soldiers and

ascetics. Even though the Juna *akhara* was traditionally seen as a subsidiary to the Niranjani *akhara*, it is now by far the largest *akhara*. Their numerical superiority has allowed them to claim a far higher public profile. Local sites controlled by the Junas include the Maya Devi temple and the Bhairav Akhara.

LINGA ("EMBLEM, MARK") A cylindrical shaft set in a flat base, which is the symbolic form of the god Shiva. The cylinder has clear phallic associations (reflecting both Shiva's generative power and the power that comes from celibacy), but it also reflects the form in which Shiva first appears in myth—as a gigantic pillar of fire.

MAHANIRVANI *AKHARA* One of the seven Shaiva *akharas*—the "regiments" of militant ascetics who in earlier times were mercenary soldiers and ascetics. The Nirvani *akhara* controls the Daksha Mahadev temple in Kankhal, which is an important local site but far from Hardwar's ritual center at Har-ki-Pairi.

MAHANT ("GREAT ONE") A head of a monastery or *math*, in some ways comparable to an abbot. The *sanyasi mahants* were (and are) powerful figures in Hardwar. They had complete control over their institution's resources, which often gave them access to great wealth, and because of this, they often had considerable local influence.

MAHATMYA ("GREATNESS") A text written to glorify the holiness of a person, place, or thing.

MATH ("MONASTERY") Settled institution that serves as a religious center and a dwelling place for ascetics, governed by a *mahant*.

MAYAPURI ("MAYA'S CITY") Early name for the entire Hardwar region, which appears in *mahatmya*s up to the early nineteenth century. In modern times, it refers to a particular area of Hardwar downstream from Har-ki-Pairi, near the starting point for the Upper Ganges Canal.

NARAYANI SHILA ("VISHNU'S STONE") A small temple in the Mayapur area that is probably one of Hardwar's oldest sites. It is one of Hardwar's few temples controlled by the Hardwar *panda*s. The site's charter myth ties it to Vishnu's triumph over the demon Gayasur (in Gaya in Bihar), and it is described as an appropriate site for memorial rites.

NIRANJANI *AKHARA* One of the seven Shaiva *akhara*s—the "regiments" of militant ascetics who in earlier times were mercenary soldiers and ascetics. The Niranjanis have historically been Hardwar's most powerful *akhara*, and for this reason, they have marched first in the Kumbha Mela

processions. In recent years, the Niranjanis' pre-eminence has been challenged by the Juna *akhara*, but they are still a wealthy and powerful group. Local sites controlled by the Niranjanis include the Bilvakeshvar temple, Mansa Devi temple, Sharvan Nath temple, and Virabhadreshvar temple.

NIRMALA *AKHARA* One of the Kumbha Mela's thirteen ascetic *akhara*s. According to tradition, the group originates from five Sikhs sent to study in Benares by Guru Gobind Singh. These men later set up schools to teach but had become so imbued by Hindu ideas from their time in Benares that the Khalsa Sikhs (who see themselves as the model for Sikh identity) consider them to be outside the Sikh community.

PANDA (FROM *PANDITA*, "A LEARNED MAN") A local Hardwar brahmin who serves as a fixer and guide for his pilgrim clients and arranges for all the pilgrims' ritual, material, and logistical needs while they are in Hardwar. This relationship is hereditary, based on the pilgrim's ancestral village. In earlier times, the *panda* community provided an essential support network, but their material importance to pilgrims has declined with the development of a better tourism infrastructure (hotels and transportation).

PINDADAN A commemorative rite in which a man symbolically feeds his departed ancestors by offering small balls made from rice or flour. Hardwar's main site for this rite is Kushavarta Ghat.

PUJA ("HOMAGE") The most general name for Hindu worship. *Puja* can be directed toward a variety of recipients—gods, ancestors, spirits, and even animals (e.g., the cow). The basic form is a series of offerings, modeled on offering the sort of hospitality one would give an honored guest (offering a seat, things to eat and drink, respect, and even entertainment).

PURANA ("OLD") A genre of religious texts. The *purana*s are compendia of traditional lore, with individual texts usually showing sharp sectarian biases. In theory, a *purana* should include five elements—the creation and dissolution/re-creation of the earth, and stories of the gods, of the sages, and of the kings in the solar and lunar lineages —but one of their most common features is the glorification of holy places.

RUDRAKSHA ("EYE OF RUDRA") A dried seed of the tree *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*. The most common *rudraksha*, which has a hole running through the middle and five longitudinal divisions, is considered to be a material form of Shiva himself; other deities are identified with *rudraksha*s having other numbers of divisions. Because of this association with Shiva, *sanyasi*s wear strings of *rudraksha* beads and use them in religious rituals.

SADHU ("STRAIGHT") A general term used to denote any ascetic, regardless of sectarian affiliation or initiated status. Among ascetics themselves, it more commonly refers to ascetics who have not taken formal ascetic initiation, whereas initiates tend to identify themselves by their particular group (as *sanyasis, bairagis,* etc.).

SAMADHI ("TRANCE") In the yoga literature, this refers to the deepest state of meditation, in which the meditator attains unity with the Absolute. This word is also used to refer to the memorial shrines set up over the burial places of prominent ascetics, since it is popularly believed that they are not dead, but in deep meditation.

SANYASI ("RENUNCIANT") In its most general meaning, a man who has entered the fourth stage of life according to the traditional pattern prescribed in the Dharma literature (student, householder, forest dweller, and wandering ascetic). The word more commonly refers to the organized ascetic groups that worship Shiva as their primary deity.

SAPINDIKARANA ("JOINING *PINDA*S") The last of the immediate funerary rites, usually done on the twelfth day after death. During the rite, a rice or flour ball representing the deceased person is mixed with another ball representing his orher ancestors, symbolically enacting the change of status from a wandering spirit to an established ancestor.

SHALIGRAM A black stone that contains an ammonite—a spiral-shaped fossil. The fossil is considered to be the discus, one of the God Vishnu's attributes, and so the *shaligram* is considered a manifestation of Vishnu. Unlike a created image, in which the deity's presence must be ritually installed, Vishnu is always present in the *shaligram*.

TIRTHA ("CROSSING PLACE") A portal through which human beings can gain direct contact with some sort of sacred power. Although the word *tirtha* can be used to describe a holy person, it most commonly designates a holy place.

UDASI ("INDIFFERENT") A group of ascetics founded by Shri Chand, the oldest son of the Sikh founder Guru Nanak. This relationship gave the Udasis a long connection with the developing Sikh community, but since the Udasis worship multiple Hindu deities, this connection was broken in the twentieth century, when the Sikhs increasingly sought to define themselves as a separate religious community. The Udasis march third in the Kumbha Mela processions, after the *sanyasis* and *bairagis,* and although the Udasis do not control any of Hardwar's important religious sites, their extensive landholdings make them a wealthy and influential group in Hardwar.

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Notes

CHAPTER 1

1. For example, William Sax's *Mountain Goddess* (1991) shows the mirroring relationship between Nanda Devi pilgrimage and Kumaoni society, and his *Dancing the Self* (2002) shows how ritual performance both reflects and enacts social relationships.

2. Bharati (1963, 1970) and Bhardwaj (1973) have given the best known examples of these typological analyses. Bharati's scheme is more or less a list, but since the criteria for each level are unclear, choosing a level for a place seems arbitrary. Bhardwaj proposes a measurable criterion—the size of the *tirtha*'s "catchment area"—but gets into trouble when he claims that lower level shrines draw people with pragmatic needs and higher level shrines draw people with more abstract religious goals (see Morinis 1984: 233–38).

3. Geertz (1973: 21). Geertz himself admits that moving from the particular to the general has been problematic, and van der Veer (1989: 44–52) has criticized Geertz's conception of religion as static and ahistorical. This critique seems to have some merit, but few would disagree with the claims that fieldwork involves interpretation and that one must begin with the particular.

4. For examples of how Hindu *tirtha*s have changed over time, see Bakker (1986) and van der Veer (1989) for Ayodhya, Burghart (1978) for Janakpur, Vaudeville (1976) and Entwistle (1987) for Braj, and Freeman (1975) for Kapileshvar.

5. This same review contrasts Eck's *Banaras* with Alan Morinis's *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition*; the latter clearly addresses the task

of comparing the reported with the real, but "leaves out the magic and the mystery" (Kumar 1986: 318).

6. Vidyarthi and his students study Hindu pilgrimage places using three "sacred" categories—Sacred Centers, Sacred Performances, and Sacred Specialists—none of which focus on pilgrims. Van der Veer frankly admits that his focus "is on the sacred centre and the religious specialists, and not on the pilgrim and his journey" (1989: 58).

7. The day after another *sadhu* stole all of his money, Gross met a *bairagi* who not only offered him initiation but also promised to teach him and take care of his material needs. Gross notes: "He seemed much more learned than many of the other sadhus I had previously been with and . . . I doubted I would have a similar chance in the near future" (1992: 94). For Gross, initiation was a successful research strategy, since it "provided me with a legitimate status, . . . brought me into contact with many ascetics I might not otherwise have met, allowed me to develop and maintain social relationships with them more easily, and put me in a position to learn more about their social organization and the nature of their religious experience" (95).

8. Anthropological studies have tended to focus on village communities, which tend to be small and have clear boundaries, making them easy to study. By itself, this sort of focus is not a problem, but it sometimes generates the implicit assumption that village practice is somehow normative, against which less "traditional" urban Hindus fall short.

9. This claim may have been exaggerated, since this person was complaining that the state government ignored Hardwar's needs. According to the 2001 census, Uttarakhand's population is almost 75 percent rural (*Census* 2004: 2.xlvii).

10. The most likely explanation for this separation is the emergence of Rishikesh as a *kshetra* in its own right. Among Indians, Swami Shivananda was one significant figure promoting this region; for Europeans and Americans, it was the Beatles.

11. Cunningham (cited in IGI 1885: 332) bases this date on an inscription over the temple's door. The temple's age seems to support the local interpretation, but Cunningham also speculated (1975: 296–97) that the name may have been Mayurapuri, "city of peacocks," since peacocks abounded in the nearby hills.

12. As the starting point for pilgrimages to Badrinath (sacred to Vishnu) and Kedarnath (sacred to Shiva), Hardwar is thus the door to these deities. It is also the passageway through which the Ganges leaves the mountains and enters the north Indian plain.

13. Crowds have steadily increased throughout the twentieth century. Hardwar's Kumbha Mela drew an estimated six million pilgrims on one day in 1986 (Badhwar 1986: 75) and ten million in 1998; Allahabad drew an estimated fifteen million pilgrims for the climactic day in 1989 (Kaul 1989: 1) and a stunning 30 million in 2001. By comparison, Hardwar's 1903 Kumbha Mela drew only an estimated 400,000 pilgrims (HMI Sept. 1903: 18). For the astrological conditions determining Kumbha Mela and a discussion of the factors behind these stunning increases, see Lochtefeld (2004).

14. Local tradition ascribes Kushavarta's construction to the eighteenth-century Maratha queen Ahalya Bai Holkar, which could well be true. Not only did she live during the time that the Marathas controlled Hardwar but also Kushavarta *ghat* bears stone plaques inscribed with the words "Holkar" and "Maharaja Scindia, Indore."

15. Chapter 2 examines both incidents in greater detail, but the Bilvakeshvar claim is clearly recent, since the seventeenth-century HDM gives a very different charter myth for the site.

16. The story's major episodes are depicted in tableaux set into the temple walls.

17. I do not know whether Gulshan Kumar was particularly devoted to Bilvakeshvar or whether he was attracted to this site because it was relatively undeveloped and thus his patronage would be even more visible. This patronage abruptly ended when he was murdered in 1997.

18. Of course, attributions change even when a site stays the same. Dvivedi (1927: 5) describes the temple currently ascribed to Shankaracharya (eighth century C.E.) as five hundred years old, and in 1989 one of the rock-cut goddesses was identified as Santoshi Ma, a "new" goddess whose popularity was increasing at that time.

19. Cunningham (cited in IGI, 1885: 332) speculates that the Maya Devi temple may date from the tenth or eleventh century. Mulchand (1904: 62) attributes the current Chandi Devi temple to Jammu king Suchet Singh, but Hardwicke (1801: 311–12) reports a shrine there as early as 1796, and a "chandika tirtha" is mentioned in the *Mayapurimahatmya* (2.17). Mansa Devi seems to have been developed much later: Dvivedi's *Haradvaramahatmya* (1927) minutely describes Hardwar but does not mention Mansa Devi, and the temple's oldest visible inscription was from 1945.

20. The Sharvan Nath temple is notable both because it can be precisely dated and because it testifies to the *naga sanyasi*s' enormous wealth (see chapter 3). An inscription at the temple reports that the *sanyasi mahant* (abbot) Sharvan Nath not only funded the temple's construction but also donated 100,000 rupees to the local brahmins—an unbelievable sum at the time (see Appendix I).

CHAPTER 2

1. A *mahatmya* ("greatness") is a textual genre describing a text written to describe the holiness of something (person, place, or thing).

2. For instance, the MPM has three chapters describing the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice, and it makes more sense to discuss this version in conjunction with the other versions. In the same way, many of the texts describe ritual actions.

3. The *Mahabharata* (MHB), *Padma Purana* (P.), and *Vayu Purana* (V.) locate this event at Gangadvara; the *Shiva Purana* (S.), *Skanda Purana* (Sk.), *Linga Purana* (L.), *Varaha Purana* (Var.), *Naradiya Purana* (Nar.), and MPM place it at Kankhal. The rest of the sources do not mention a location. It is interesting that so many of these accounts do not mention Kankhal, since this site is now widely accepted as the location.

4. The story is important to Shaivas because it is focused on Shiva's greatness. Its importance to Shaktas comes in the establishment of the *shaktipitha*s ("Seats of the Goddess"), a later element in some of the stories. According to this story, Shiva was grief-stricken after Sati's death and roamed the earth carrying her corpse, neglecting his divine duties. Vishnu eventually solved this problem by gradually disposing of Sati's body—he cut it away bit by bit with his discus, and every place where a part of Sati's body fell to earth, it became a particular form of the Goddess. The text and chapters for

these accounts—which vary widely—are as follows: Br. Gau 39, Bhag. 4.2–7, Bvv. Krsnajanmakhand 42–43, K. 1.14–15, L. 99–100, MHB. 12.274, M. 13, Nar. 2.66, P. 1.5, S. 2.22–36, Sk. 1.1–5, Vam. 4–5, Var. 21, and V. 1.30 (see the list of abbreviations).

5. I was given this account at the Virabhadra temple, across the street from the Daksha temple, on 2 July 1990. Though I have called the Goddess Sati, in conformity with the *purana*s, the storyteller consistently referred to her as Parvati, even though according to the story Parvati was not born until after Sati's death. I found that most people, and even some of the Hindi pamphlets telling this story, did not make a strong distinction between these two.

6. Pathak (1978: 205) claims that Sati's speech to Daksha in Bhag. 5.11–16 and S. 2.2.14.45–53 are remarkably similar and from this infers that one is based on the other. The *Shiva Purana* citation is incorrect—it is not chapter 14, but chapter 29. Aside from this, I find little similarity between these two passages, and in general, the *Bhagavata Purana*'s style is much denser than the other *purana*s.

7. Interestingly, Shiva seems unaffected by this family tension until he learns of Sati's death, which probably reflects his position in the family. As Sati's husband, he knows that her primary commitment should be to him.

8. For the origin and development of this myth and the various enumerations of the *pitha*s, see Sircar (1973: 6–7, 17–31).

9. A few verses can be traced to the *Bhagavata Purana*, such as Bhag. 4.3.6, 4.4.2, 4.4.14–26, 4.7.2–5, 4.7.8, and 4.7.11. Some of these are identical; the others show clear dependence.

10. S. 2.2.28.26,28 and Sk. 1.1.2.56, respectively.

11. This reference to "fruits" is literal, not metaphorical. The Sanskrit pilgrimage literature meticulously discusses both the religious merit generated by ritual actions at *tirtha*s and the "demerits" that come from eliding these.

12. One example of a *phalashruti* occurs in the final verse of Shiva's reply to Daksha.

13. This story appears in: Br. Gau 8, Bd. 2.44–56, Bhag. 9.8–9, Bvv. Prakrtikhand 10, D. Bhag. 9.11–12, MHB. 3.104–7, M. 191.36, Nar. 1.7–15, P. 1.8.144.50ff., P. 5.20–21, Ram. 1.38–44, S. 3.38ff., Sk. 5.3.56.1–12, V. Uttarakhanda. 26, Vi. 4.4, VDS. 1.17–18, Har. 1.14–15. Andreas Bock (1984: 197) has not only minutely compared these differing versions but also drawn a stemma to illustrate their relationships. I have consulted his stemma and located some of the accounts, thanks to his work, but except where noted, the ideas here are my own.

14. See the accounts in the *Harivamsa*, *Vayu Purana*, *Shiva Purana*, and *Padma Purana* (Utt.).

15. See VDS 1.18.22–23, Bd. 2.54.52, and Vi. 4.4.29–31.

16. See Br. Gau 8.70.

17. I am indebted to Bock's stemma for this information.

18. See HOD 1.2.1161, s.v. Anantabhatta, son of Yadubhatta.

19. One person cited this notion as the reason that the *kanvar* pilgrims were so careful to draw their water from Brahmakund in Hardwar and not from other places on the Ganges.

20. For examples, see Salomon (1985: intro.), Saraswati (1983), and Aiyengar (1942). Since this chapter examines Sanskrit texts, in it I cite the Sanskrit forms of words such as *snana* and *dana*. In later chapters describing current practice, I use the Hindi versions (*snan/dan*).

21. This verse occurs in P. 1.62.117, P. 3.43.54–55, P. 6.3.14, M. 106.53–54, K. 1.33.34, G. 1.81.1–2, and Br. Gau 7.25. Variant versions appear in Nar. 2.39.46, Nar. 2.40.26–27, and HDM 3.28. The word *durlabha,* translated "extraordinary," literally means "difficult to obtain."

22. See Nar. 2.40.36, MHB 13.26.12, G. 81.29, and MPM 2.15; HDM 6.49 mentions these five places but with different names to accommodate a longer meter: Brahmakunda, Darbhavarta, Bilvakam, Kanakhalam, and Nilam.

23. See G. 84.10, P. 1.11.4, K. 2.20.33–36, M. 22.66 and 22.70, and VS 75.11, 14, 15, and 28.

24. See VDS 1.18.22–23, Bd. 2.54.52, and Vi. 4.4.29.31.

25. Nar. Uttarakhanda. 66.26, 66.29–30, and 66.37.

26. See MHB 1.154.1, 1331*; 3.95.11; 3.356.24; and 1.92.1 (var.); see also P. 1.2 and P. 1.62.116.

27. Var. 126. Kubjamraka's uncertain location is discussed later in this chapter.

28. HDM 1.38 (Surya), 2.1–24 (Rama), and 2.25–35 and 3.9–14 (Jahnu).

29. Nar. Uttarakhanda 66. The *Naradiya Purana* is one of the subsidiary *purana*s (*upapurana*) that are generally judged to be later than the major *purana*s. Although Kane (HOD 5.893) puts the *Naradiya Purana* as having been completed between 700 and 1000 C.E., it is quite possible that parts of the *purana* were added later.

30. Some of these modern sites are Har-ki-Pairi (Haripada), Kushavarta (Jahnutirtha), Saptarishi (Saptaganga), Bhim Ghoda (Bhimasthala), and Kankhal. One possible source for this list is the *tirthayatra* section in the *Mahabharata*, which names eight sites identical to those in the *Naradiya Purana* and three more which are very similar.

31. The *mahatmya* mentions the benefits of giving a cow in verses 26 and 37. Other verses laud feeding brahmins, an element in the *shraddha* ceremony.

32. The best known spot for performing this rite was Prayag; this is attested by both inscriptions and by travelers' accounts. See Hsuan Tsang (1969: 232), al-Biruni (1971: 170–71), al-Bada'uni (1976: 179), and Sircar (1983: 44). This was a controversial rite, and Hindus themselves engaged in active debate on its propriety.

33. According to Tripathi (1978: 313), Varuni occurs when the thirteenth day of the dark half of Chaitra coincides with the lunar asterism (*nakshatra*) named *shatabhishak*; Mahavaruni occurs when Varuni falls on a Saturday; and Mahamahavaruni occurs when a Mahavaruni festival coincides with any other astrologically auspicious time. The latter are infrequent; the 1892 Mahavaruni fair would have been the first in thirty-seven years (HMI, Dec. 1892: 19).

34. According to Monier-Williams (1984), *vyatipata* occurs when "the sun and moon are in the opposite *ayana* and have the same declination, the sum of their longitudes being 180 degrees."

35. Var. 125.101, 125.128, and 126.35 mention Mayatirtha, and 126.10 mentions Gangadvara.

36. Atkinson (1973), *Himalayan Gazetteer*, 2.1.339–340. Atkinson's information corresponds to the only answer I received when I asked about this, when the person mentioned a Kubjamraka Devi in Narendranagar, north of Rishikesh.

37. Dey (1971: 105) describes Kubjamraka as "a celebrated place of pilgrimage at some distance to the north of Hrsikesha (Rishikesh), sacred to Vishnu," but this conveys no precise location.

38. The evidence is quite clear: the interpolated text is absent from all other HDM manuscripts, the text before and after the interpolated block is identical in all manuscripts, the interpolation has a change in the speakers (from Narada and Brahma to Suta and Varaha), and the block ends with the phrase "Thus says the *Shri Varaha Purana*," which stops in the middle of the word "*purana*," as if the copyist suddenly remembered not to include that part. The block was included because the immediately preceding verses name a place called Kubjam as the site of King Bali's sacrifice. Bali was a powerful *asura* (powerful beings who were adversaries to the gods, but not intrinsically evil) but was eventually defeated by Vishnu, who approached him in the form of a dwarf and asked for three paces of land for a sacrificial ground. When Bali agreed, Vishnu became enormously large and, in three paces, measured out the entire universe. The name Kubjam is nearly identical to Kubjamraka, and more careful editing could have made this addition less noticeable.

39. Var. 126.17 is identical to MPM 16.31–32; the subsequent verses are very close.

40. MPM 16.46–47 describes Vishnu as Varaha in the Krta Age, Kratuviryakam in the Treta, Vamana in the Dvapara, and Bharata in the Kali. This last identification may be an attempt to connect the story with the Bharata temple, said to be the oldest temple in Rishikesh.

41. The story recounts that Somasharma became a woman while bathing in the Ganges, lived fifty years in that body, and was changed back to Somasharma after another Ganges bath—only to discover that a few moments had actually elapsed. This power to bewilder and bedazzle the mind characterizes Vishnu's *maya*.

42. I gained much greater insight into this text while preparing the presentation titled "Imagined Landscapes: Space and Place in the *Haridvaramahatmya*." This was delivered in March 2008 at "The Ocean of Devotion" symposium sponsored by the University of Florida's Center for the Study of Hindu Traditions (CHiTra). I thank the conference attendees for their helpful comments and Prof. Vasudha Narayanan for inviting me to the conference. A brief list of the manuscripts is as follows:

P1: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune (hereafter BORI), 1616 C.E./*samvat* 1673.
P2: BORI, 1637 C.E./*samvat* 1694.
P3: BORI, 1724 C.E./*samvat* 1781.
P4: BORI, 1826 C.E./*samvat* 1883.
P5: Mandlik Library, Fergusson College, Pune. Undated, incomplete.
B3: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Benares, 1824 C.E./*samvat* 1881, incomplete.

43. P1 interpolates the *Varaha Purana's* Kubjamraka *mahatmya* in the middle of chapter 1 (see note 38), and this addition points to an earlier manuscript. P3 (*samvat* 1781/1724 C.E.) and P4 (*samvat* 1884/1827 C.E.) are both clearly based on P2; the latter reproduces P2 down to marginalia and addenda, and holes in P2 match blank spaces in P3. P5 is textually similar to the others, except for two folios of four pages each that come from a completely different manuscript. Both documents are written in the same hand, so it seems likely that the two texts were mistakenly combined when the manuscripts were donated to the library.

44. Two external factors accelerated Bhim Ghoda's demise. When the new supply channel for the Upper Ganges Canal was dug in 1916, this diminished the water flow in the old supply channel, which ran directly past Bhim Ghoda. The second factor was the railway viaduct that was built in 1900 between the shrine and the Ganges, which forever precluded any sort of free-flowing supply.

45. Felix V. Raper, "Narrative of a Survey for the Purpose of Discovering the Sources of the Ganges," 458. On the same page, Raper describes Bhim Ghoda as a good place for bathing but remarks that it was not considered especially holy. This comment contrasts with the HDM and later British government sentiment.

46. It became even more active in the late 1990s, when the well-known film composer Gulshan Kumar financed several large construction projects.

47. The *mahatmya* describes Bilvaka's father as a childless ascetic whose ancestors begged him in a vision to have some children. Through his accumulated ascetic powers, he transformed two *bilva* fruits into a son and a daughter. For further consideration on the motif of the childless ascetic, see Kakar (1989: 196–97).

48. Bilvakeshvar's central image is a *svayambhu* ("self-manifested") *linga* marking the spot where Shiva revealed himself. A neem tree currently grows over this *linga*, but the ascetics running the site claimed that there used to be a *bilva* tree—an attempt to gloss the site's name as "Lord of the Bilva [tree]." The Parvati tradition dates at least from the 1920s; see Dvivedi (1927: 5). At least two other Himalayan sites—both named Gaurikund—are also said to be where Shiva and Parvati met. One of these is near Kedarnath, and the other is near Gangotri.

49. After an introductory verse (5.16), the *mahatmya* describes the physical universe (5.17–30), describes Vishnu's *maya* as a woman dwelling in Mayapuri (5.30–40), describes her physical form as an object of mental visualization (5.41–42), and lists prescribed morning rites to gain her favor (5.43–58). Perhaps this Maya is Maya Devi, the patron goddess of one of Hardwar's oldest temples.

50. The *mahatmya* sets the entire story in Hardwar, whereas in the *Bhagavata Purana* (4.1–2), Ajamila goes there only after being rescued by Garuda (Bhag. 4.2.39). The *mahatmya* also includes a speech in which Yama declares that he has no authority over people who die in Hardwar, no matter how evil they are (HDM 6.40).

51. One of these sites is Brahmakund, for which the text gives the most common charter myth: that upon gaining a divine boon, King Ikshvaku requested that Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva would dwell there eternally. It also describes spots associated with Ganesha, Durga, and Shiva.

52. These meters are based on precise combinations of "heavy" and "light" syllables, which allow different meters to have the same number of syllables per line. The most common narrative meter, a*nushtubh*, has eight syllables per quarter. The first half also includes verses written in *shardulavikridita* (nineteen syllables per quarter), *malini* (fifteen), *upendravajra* (eleven), *upajati* (twelve), and *vanshastavila* (twelve); the second half uses all five of these but includes as well *chitra* (sixteen), *panchachamara* (also sixteen, but *chitra*'s mirror image), *srgdhara* (twenty-one), *bhujangaprayata* (twelve), *mandakranta* (seventeen), *shikharini* (seventeen), and *vasantatilaka* (fourteen). In one dizzying burst of virtuosity in chapter 7 (verses 19–36), the poet shifts the meter ten times and uses seven different meters.

53. Bhimakund, Suryakund, Ramakund, Brahmakund, Kushavarta, Bilvakeshvar, Nila Parvat, and the Maya Devi and Bhairava temples are all within a mile of Brahmakund; Kankhal is three miles away.

54. HDM 2.20 prescribes rites for the *ekadashi* (eleventh day), which is particularly important for Vaishnavas; HDM 7.11–12 specify rites for the fourth, eighth, ninth, and fourteenth days of the waxing moon.

55. Strachan (1962: 256) reports that the English traveler Tom Coryat went to Hardwar in 1617, one year after the date of the HDM's oldest manuscript. Abul al-Fazl (AIN. 3.335) reports large numbers of pilgrims on the tenth day of the lunar month of Chaitra, which occurs in March–April.

56. Since both the first and second halves of the text mention the same sites, this suggests the work of a compiler trying to meld several different texts. Such repetition seems less likely if one imagines an author seeking to expand on a single text.

57. This emphasis also appears in the verses after P2's colophon, which stress restraints and avoidances: "On Sunday one should give up hot water, treacle, oil, meat, eating at night, sexual intercourse, and bell-metal vessels. A comfortable bed, fire, cloth, betel-nut, baths and massages, tooth-sticks, and fragrances are harmful to a religious student (*brahmacharin*). On the eleventh day (of a lunar fortnight) one should give up sesame, grain, beverages, betel-nut, fruits, paid work, sleeping at night, bodily adornment, vain baths, and cooked food."

58. One can interpret this as a way to reach out to Vaishnava pilgrims, especially in light of the *mahatmya*'s concluding verses, which explicitly identify four major Hindu deities (Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva, and Bhairava) with Rama and his brothers, who are all forms of Vishnu.

59. Majumdar (1974: 193) notes that Hindu pilgrims freely visited their shrines during Jahangir's reign. Jahangir also did not revive the tax on Hindu pilgrims that Akbar had abolished (Entwistle 1987: 173).

60. Sources record several pitched battles at Hardwar between *sanyasi*s and *bairagi*s (Vaishnava ascetics); these are discussed in chapter 3 in the section on organized ascetics. These incidents clearly show that the Dashanamis had influence in Hardwar and that they were willing to defend it.

61. Certain sites, such as Brahmakund and Bhimakund, were probably mentioned because they were so important that they had to be mentioned in any description, even if brahmins had a strong presence there.

62. I am deeply indebted to the Scindia Oriental Institute in Ujjain for allowing me to photograph their manuscript copy of the MPM, against which I compared all of the other versions. Without their kindness such comparisons would have been impossible. The list of manuscripts is as follows:

(U): Scindia Oriental Institute, Ujjain, undated.
(Bik): Anup Sanskrit Library, Bikaner, 1813 CE/*samvat* 1870
(C): OIOC Collections, London, 1803 CE/*samvat* 1860, copied in Calcutta
(J): OIOC Collections, London, 1811 CE/*samvat* 1868, copied in Jalalabad (this location is ambiguous, since Uttar Pradesh has two Jalalabads, and there is also one in Punjab).
(B1): Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Benares, incomplete (final pages missing)
(B2): Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Benares, 1829 CE/*samvat* 1886

63. The Nagari Pracharini Sabha does not permit its holdings to be photographed or photocopied, and copying by hand is limited to 10 percent of any given manuscript. These restrictions meant that I could "copy" B1, since its differences with U. were largely variants and extra verses, but that B2 was inaccessible.

64. The *Kedarakhand* compiler used manuscripts collected by the Badrinath temple head priest; the author of the Naval Kishor Press edition mentions the *Kedarakhand* and a "Laitho" edition but does not disclose his own manuscript sources.

65. Historian Shiva Prasad Dabral (1965: 148) calls the *Kedarakhand* an "addendum" (*kshepak*); it is generally the source for any verses about Hardwar attributed to the *Skanda Purana* (e.g., Dave 1959: 55, 57), since this *purana* has very few references to Hardwar.

66. The Kedarakhand region roughly coincides with the Garwhal region of modern Uttarakhand state, comprising the Tehri, Pauri, Chamoli, and Uttarkashi districts, as well as parts of the Dehra Dun and Hardwar districts. The text describes this region as stretching from Gangadvara to the Himalayas, from the Tamasa River in the east to Bauddhacala in the west (KK. 40.28, cited from Dabral 1965: 149).

67. The text as a whole parallels the form of chapter 2, with the first half focusing on sites closer to Hardwar and the second half on sites in Rishikesh (or in Kubjamraka, which the text seems to identify with Rishikesh).

68. Virabhadreshvar (controlled by the Niranjani *akhara*) is closer to Rishikesh, but all of the others are well-known sites in Hardwar proper.

69. Chapters 6, 7, and 9 tell long stories about sinful people being transformed by these places, chapter 8 adds a long list of minor *tirtha*s, and chapters 13 and 14 narrate the tale of King Dhamadvaja, who was cursed to be reborn as a snake.

70. The list contains at least twenty *tirtha*s, of which the only readily identifiable ones are Bilveshvar and Narayani Shila. Since the former is the subject of chapter 7, this seems to show that the text is based on multiple sources.

71. The final eight chapters contain the word Kubjamraka in their titles, and B1 and Bik. drop the word Mayapuri from some chapter titles; this points to places where the different texts have been joined. This is even clearer in the table of contents for the Venkateshvar edition of the *Kedarakhand*, which after chapter 115 (corresponding to MPM 15) notes “this is the end of the *Haridvaramahatmya*.”

72. The only concrete places in Rishikesh appear in MPM 16.46–47 and 23.88–89. These verses describe Vishnu’s different forms at Kubjamraka in the different cosmic ages and state that during the Kali Age, he will be there as Bharata. This seems to be an attempt to connect the text to Rishikesh’s Bharata temple, which is the oldest temple there.

73. The disease is named *rajayaksma*, which according to Monier-Williams was later identified with tuberculosis.

74. Kane (HOD 4.578–79) notes that several *purana*s and compendia say that one should not examine the learning of *tirtha* brahmins and assert the superiority of an unlettered local brahmin over a learned outsider. Such verses plainly favor local brahmins but hint that they were unlearned. The charter myth for Gaya’s brahmins (HOD 4.579–80) highlights their avariciousness, as do Kane’s remarks on 4.405.

75. Here I do not include the second Benares manuscript (B2), which was written in 1829 but is clearly a different text.

76. For a history of this troubled century, see SDG (1981: 48–61).

77. Hardwar tradition credits Ahalya Bai Holkar (d. 1795) with building Kushavarta Ghat, and Sardesai (1946–48: 2.243) notes Maratha patronage at Hindu pilgrimage sites.

78. Hardwicke (1801: 312) estimated that the crowd for the 1796 Kumbha Mela was 2.5 million people, and Raper (1979: 453) estimated the 1808 Kumbha Mela at two million. Regardless of whether these estimates were completely accurate, there were clearly large crowds there. My limited exposure to Hardwar *panda* records, many of which begin about 1800 C.E., also supports the inference that pilgrimage picked up at this time.

79. MPM 9.5–12. The text goes on to say that if even a *shudra* can gain such benefits, they are assured for high-status people such as brahmins.

80. The clearest example was Kushavarta Ghat, where the Kushavarta *mahatmya*’s twelve verses were visibly posted in 1989–90 (although not in 2005). The text’s conclusion stresses Kushavarta’s sanctity and the merit of ritual actions there: “Those fortunate men [who] bathe and do ancestral rites [here] will never take birth again, nor will their ancestors. [Merit from anything] given at Kushavarta, the great *tirtha*, is [magnified] ten million times. Thus I have told you the origin of merit-bestowing Kushavarta, one who merely hears this tale is freed from all sins” (MPM 12.9–10).

81. For example, a Somavati Amavasya on 6 June 2005 reportedly drew 4 million visitors.

82. See Sharma (1914, 1920) and Dvivedi (1927); the most recent example I have found is Svayampaki (1986). One day a local brahmin told me the story of Ashmacitta, which to the best of my knowledge occurs only in MPM 7.

CHAPTER 3

1. "Thence you should go to Jahnu's daughter (the Ganges) descending from the lord of mountains (Himalaya) near mount Kanakhala, who served as the flight of the steps to heaven for Sagara's sons, and who, laughing as it were by her form at the frown on Gauri's face, seized the hair of Shiva, her hands in the form of waves stretching to the moon (on his crest)" (Kalidasa 1983: 91). The date comes from Warder (1977: 3.122–23).

2. "If a man dies and his bones are cast into the river, he cannot fall into an evil way . . . his soul is preserved in safety on the other side (in the other world)" (Hsuan Tsang 1969: 4.188).

3. Timur 1871: 3.455, 459; the quoted passage is on 459. The one armed force, led by Malik Shaikha, had five hundred cavalry and numerous foot soldiers (1871: 455–56). M. Pierre Amado (1974: 730) has called this an "affreux massacre de milliers d'infortunes pelerins [a dreadful massacre of thousands of unfortunate pilgrims]," but Amado's claim that these people were pilgrims seems solely based on the location, since the nearest important bathing date, Makar Sankranti, would have been more than two weeks earlier, on December 27.

4. Blochmann's translation omits this reference, which Habib (1982: 27) claims is in error: "Blochmann's text leaves the entry against Bhogpur . . . incomplete, so that the reference to Hardwar . . . is missed by the reader. MS. Add. 7652 gives the full entry as follows: '(Bhogpur) has a brick-fort. On the banks of the Gang R. is a place of worship of the Hind[u]s, Hard[w]ar.' That is, Hardwar belonged to *pargana* Bhogpur."

5. AIN., 3.335. Abul al-Fazl's date is puzzling, since it corresponds to no known festival. These crowds may explain the *Ain-i-Akbari*'s reference to Hardwar having a mint striking copper coins (AIN, 1.32–33). This was the lowest grade mint (below gold and silver, respectively), but many of the twenty-eight copper mints were in important centers (e.g., Ajmer, Benares, Gwalior, Jaunpur, Lucknow, and Sirhind). Hardwar was clearly much smaller than these places, but its pilgrim crowds may have made it a good location to circulate money.

6. Coryat died shortly thereafter, and his observations were recorded by the Reverend Edward Terry (1655: 88), as cited in Foster (1894: 2.535n).

7. For instance, see Raper (1979: 459), IGI (1885: 6.334), and Mundy (1832: 1.151).

8. See Bacon (1837: 177–80). This animal could not be domesticated and could be sold only as a curiosity.

9. Raper (1979: 452) describes meeting a merchant who had paid nine rupees for a camel ride from Marwar (in Rajasthan) to Hardwar.

10. The only caveat is that I was able to examine only a small fraction of these records, and a different picture could eventually emerge based on the whole.

11. The 1885 *Imperial Gazetteer* (5.334) describes the fair's mercantile importance, whereas the 1908 *Imperial Gazetteer* does not mention it at all.

12. The *samadhi*'s location is in a natural place for ascetics to stay, on the bank of the Ganges under two enormous pipal trees. At the same time, the inscription and the

samadhi were being used by a local ascetic who had built an ashram there, as a way to stress the age of the site and thus to reinforce his own prestige.

13. For more information about militant *sanyasi*s, see David Lorenzen (1978), Jadunath Sarkar (n.d.), G. S. Ghurye (1964: 98–113), and J. M. Ghosh (1930). For a history of their Vaishnava counterparts, the *bairagi*s, see Peter van der Veer (1989: 130–45).

14. See Bernard Cohn (1974), and D. H. A. Kolff (1971).

15. For an account of a Ramanandi pilgrimage cycle, see Burghart (1983: 364–66).

16. Bayly (1983: 386) notes that this was one reason *sanyasi*s were able to dominate trade in the Himalayan Terai and goes on to consider how merchant families needed to balance the needs of doing business with the social risks of travel outside India.

17. Bayly (1983: 126). *Sanyasi* holdings in both Mirzapur and Nagpur can be directly tied to their business interests. *Sanyasi*s also controlled the wholesale market in Mirzapur, which was the distribution center for cotton shipped overland from Nagpur.

18. Ghosh's chapter on "Resident Sanyasis" (1930: 138–60) evokes images of loan sharks and extortionists, not peaceful renunciants.

19. Peter van der Veer (1989: 157) describes how ascetics in modern Ayodhya exploit this inheritance pattern, by claiming that their illegitimate children are their disciples.

20. The inscription is translated in Appendix I. It contains several factual errors that create doubts about its veracity. In particular, it describes Vir Vikram Yudh Singh and Bhim Sen Thapa as present in Hardwar, but the former had died a few years before, and the British did not allow the latter to leave Nepal. I am grateful to Ted Riccardi for bringing these facts to my attention.

21. Nizamuddin Ahmad Bakshi (5.318) and al-Badauni (2.94–95) name the combatants as Jogis and *sanyasi*s, whereas Abul al-Fazl's *Akbar-Nama* (2.361) names these two groups as Kurs and Puris. According to William Pinch (personal communication), Abul al-Fazl's account was written many years later.

22. Abul al-Fazl Allami (1972: 423) describes this most specifically, saying that the Kurs had usurped the Puris' rightful place next to the tank.

23. Sarkar (n.d.: 86). This account comes from a history of the Mahanirvani Akhara, which Sarkar estimated was not more than fifty years old (pp. 82–83). The anachronisms in the account are references to the Rama Dal ("the army of Rama") and to Maratha troops in Hardwar. Van der Veer (1989: 136–37) reports that the Rama Dal was formed in 1757, after the conference of Galta, and Maratha troops would not have been posted in Hardwar before the decay of Mughul power in the mid-1700s. So this account may well refer to the 1760 battle.

24. According to a Peshwa copperplate inscription, 12,000 ascetics died in a battle between *sanyasi*s and *bairagi*s at the 1789 Nasik Kumbha Mela (Burghart 1983: 374). The Peshwa eventually ordered the two groups to bathe at different places. Ghurye (1964: 112) notes that similar rules were laid down for the Ujjain Kumbha

Mela, since the Peshwa ruled over both places. The Ayodhya battle is mentioned in the eighteenth-century *Shrimaharajacaritra*, see van der Veer (1989: 145), citing Bakker (1986: 149).

25. Hardwicke reports that the main opposition to this rule came from the *bairagi*s, so it seems that the ban mentioned by Raper was not absolute.

26. Raper notes that the fair finished "without any troubles or disturbance, to the great surprise and satisfaction of numbers, who were accustomed to consider bloodshed and murder inseparable from the Cumb'ha Mela" (1979: 461).

27. See Davidson (1843: 97), de Lanoye (1858: 199–200), White (1838: 106–7), and Skinner (1832: 190).

28. For remarks on the clergy and their work, see Roberts (1845: 42–3), de Lanoye (1858: 199), and Skinner (1832: 132–35, 142–43); Skinner tells a second tale of conversion on pp. 194–97.

29. See White (1838: 105), Mundy (1832: 150), Bacon (1837: 163–66, 169–70), Skinner (1832: 131), and Roberts (1845: 42); the last contrasts the intent contemplation of the pilgrims with the "idle indifferent air of the European spectators."

30. See Bacon (1837: 169–70, 172), Roberts (1845: 42–43), Mundy (1832: 153–56), Skinner (1832: 131–32, 136), White (1838: 107), and de Lanoye (1858: 197–99). Given the size of the crowds, it is not surprising that most Europeans report viewing the fair from elephants.

31. See also Davidson (1843: 75), Archer (1833: 163), White (1838: 105), and Skinner (1832: 124–26). The Kankhal road still has several buildings of this sort, although I cannot say whether they date from that era.

32. Until the twentieth century Kankhal was much larger than Hardwar; in the 1880s, Hardwar had 3,614 residents (IGI 1885: 6.331), whereas Kankhal had 5,838 (*Census of India*, 1882). Some orthoprax Hindus, including Hardwar's *panda*s (hereditary pilgrim guides), have been reluctant to live in Hardwar because of certain rules to maintain its sanctity—such as a ban on sexual activity, even marital sexuality.

33. For a comment on this street almost thirty years later, see Bacon (1837: 174).

34. For ecstatic comments on Hardwar's scenic beauty, see Emma Roberts (1845: 41), Archer (1833: 166), Bacon (1837: 168–69), Skinner (1832: 139–40), and Franklin (1805: 68–69). For references to tiger hunting and other varieties of the chase, see Davidson, (1843: 85, 109), Mundy (1832: 126, 159–64), and Skinner (1832: 140).

35. This incident actually happened in 1820; the dating error is common in older sources. Other contemporary sources mentioning the new *ghat* and the carnage of 1820 are Skinner (1832: 187–88), Mundy (1832: 156), Davidson (1843: 86), and Roberts (1845: 42). In 1808, Raper (1979: 461) had a premonition of this disaster when he reported that people on the *ghat* were involuntarily pushed into the stream by the size and pressure of the crowd. The present *ghat* has been enlarged at least twice since the 1820s, once in the 1930s and once in the 1980s.

36. Raper seems to be talking about the Ganga temple associated with Raja Man Singh, which supports the claim that this is Hardwar's oldest temple.

37. Davidson (1843: 86) remarks on the rebuilding of temples, and Mundy describes "hundreds of temples, tombs, and ruins" (1832: 154).

38. The *mahant*s lease the temples to local brahmins, who actually run them.

39. Travelers consistently call this hill Chandni Pahar, "silver mountain," but the temple there is to the goddess Chandi, with retroflex consonants. This seems to be simple confusion, since MPM 2.17 mentions a *candika tirtha*, and Raper calls the hill "Chandica Ghatta" (1979: 458).

40. Hardwicke notes that the presiding brahmin claimed to receive ten rupees a day, a handsome sum at the time.

41. See Raper (1979: 458) and Skinner (1832: 189). Skinner describes the cave as dedicated to the "god of fruitfulness" but gives no further identification.

42. Raper's testimony clearly shows the changes in the local landscape, since Bhim Ghoda is now so far from the river that it is an enclosed pool.

43. In conversation with me in 1990, Bhim Ghoda's present owner said he was trying to raise money to face the temples in marble, since a better looking site would attract more pilgrims. Up to now, he has not managed to carry this out.

44. Many visitors commented on women's bathing practices, which seem to have exposed more flesh than these visitors thought proper; see Davidson (1843: 85) and Bacon (1837: 172).

45. See Bacon (1837: 172–73). Either Bacon was mistaken in attributing this practice to ascetics, or they have since given it up. This sort of work brings very low status because living off gifts is seen as inauspicious, and ascetics are clearly concerned with maintaining their status. For reference to the court case, see Amado (1976: 963n).

46. For temples, see Davidson (1843: 92) and Skinner (1832: 171, 188); Bacon (1837: 175) mentions feeding the fish, which are described as being the size of salmon. Feeding fish is still a popular activity at Har-ki-Pairi, although they clearly visible only in winter, when the water is exceptionally clear.

47. Brahmins at Brahmakund still fulfill a similar function today. For people mentioning gifts in general, see Roberts (1845: 42), White (1838: 111), and Archer (1833: 164).

48. My limited sample showed that the earliest records from Bihar and Bengal were much later than those from contiguous areas. In the days before rail travel, the distance would have been a formidable obstacle, but another likely factor is differing ritual patterns: pilgrims near Hardwar would have gone there for *asthivisarjana*, the final funerary rite, whereas Biharis and Bengalis would have done this rite in Gaya.

49. See Bacon (1837: 167); see also White (1838: 111).

50. See also Skinner (1832: 143), White (1838: 107), and Davidson (1843: 99).

51. Davidson (1843: 93) reports that the fingers were used for hundreds and the joints for fifties, but this seems clumsy, since it limits a potential offer to multiples of fifty. Raper (1979: 460) claims that the number of fingers would be multiplied by a spoken number. In this way, two fingers could indicate two, four, twenty, forty, two hundred, or even two thousand rupees, depending on the number that was spoken.

52. See Davidson (1843: 93, 96–97), Skinner (1832: 137–39), and Mundy (1832: 165–69). Mundy awoke to find a thief in his tent but was unable to apprehend him; his

friends later comforted him with tales of people who had been stabbed in similar situations.

53. See White (1838: 105) and Davidson (1844: 81–83). Davidson calls them Rasdharees and says that they were attached to the local temples at the *ghat*.

54. This is accurate into the twentieth century; Gordon-Cummings (1901: 526, 533) comments on Hardwar's peace and quiet in November, as compared with the bustle at fair time.

55. The canal's initial survey was in 1839, and excavations began at Hardwar and Kankhal in April 1842, but lack of funding delayed its completion until 1854 (IGI 1908: 206–7).

56. Despite its benefits, the canal had one serious flaw: the branch of the Ganges chosen for the supply channel was much shallower than the main channel, which meant that the supply channel was almost empty during the dry season. This was a calamity for farmers, since the canal was dry when irrigation was needed the most. This problem was eventually solved by building the Bhim Ghoda head works, although they raised a severe problem in their own right.

57. HMI (Jan. 1892: 50). Even with special trains, the line's maximum capacity was only 25,000 pilgrims per day. Since the 500,000 people attending the 1891 Kumbha Mela were gone within a week of the main bathing day, it seems that most must have traveled by road.

58. According to the *Saharanpur District Gazetteer*, in May 1857, townspeople repelled two attacks by Gujjars who seem to have been seeking plunder, and in January 1858, a British force from Rourkee routed troops led by the Nawab of Najibabad, who had proclaimed Hardwar captured territory (SDG 1981: 66, 68).

59. HMI (Mar. 1870), passim. For annual fairs, the authorities usually levied policemen from stations throughout the district, though in 1870, the government sanctioned a request for troops because the time was so short.

60. In 1855, only the first group had a definite starting time, since the later processions began after the preceding one had reached a certain point.

61. After 1903, the Akalis completely disappear from the record, and this coincides with the growth of Sikh religious consciousness and the insistence that Sikhs were not Hindus. This notion of Sikh separateness would have worked against any desire to take part in a Hindu festival.

62. The 1891 report refers to reports from 1879 and 1867, and although these are not extant, it seems that the general arrangements were very similar.

63. Many people were killed or injured in 1879, when crowding forced people over the sides of a bridge near the bathing *ghat* (HMI Jan. 1892: 43). The 1891 and 1903 Kumbha Melas both passed without accidental deaths, but there were fatal accidents in 1915 and 1927 (SDG 1917: 28; 1934: 20). The latest accident was in 1986, when some fifty people were trampled in a stampede; this prompted draconian crowd control measures at the 1998 Mela. The greatest accidental loss of life came during the 1954 Allahabad Kumbha Mela, when at least five hundred people died in a stampede.

64. As Katherine Prior suggests, an important aspect of this new emphasis may have been to validate the colonial enterprise as promoting "progress" (1993: 38).

65. Whereas 1855 was a Kumbha Mela year, the other years would have been the annual fair.

66. Murray reports that pilgrims were spurred in part by rumors that "this would be the last of the great Koomb fairs, as Hurdwar had lost its sacred character from the Ganges having been diverted into the Ganges Canal." The 1.25 million estimate was from a later source; contemporary estimates were closer to about 2.5 million people (HMI, Jan. 1870: 65). Estimates for attendance at Kumbha Melas between 1796 and 1855 are all between two and three million. See Hardwicke (1801: 312), Raper (1979: 453), Bacon (1837: 170), *Asiatic Journal* (1833: 10.61), NWPJCP (May 1844: 157/2; June 1855: 2/8). Although I believe these estimates were inflated, it seems that attendance dropped off sharply in the late 1800s.

67. Murray describes the nearest rail connections as Ghaziabad and Amritsar, but Ambala is much closer than Amritsar, and here I think he was simply mistaken.

68. This number comes from Murray's "Report on the Hurdwar Cholera of 1867"; Prior (1993: 40), citing a later report, puts the epidemic's total mortality at 125,000.

69. See Sharma (1976: 23), HMI (Jan. 1892: 22, 33), IGI (1908: 13.53), HMI (April 1909, passim), and SDG (1981: 299–300). The last source reports an annual wave of cholera in the district, which pilgrim crowds could amplify.

70. The heated response of Hardwar's *panda*s to the Mahavaruni Fair dispersion, and to the suspension of rail booking several years later, shows that this final remark was correct.

71. Legislation was dismissed on practical grounds: that it would greatly offend Hindus but be used so infrequently that government thought it better to proceed ad hoc. This assessment came a year after the dispersion of the Mahavaruni Fair and doubtless reflected the unpleasantness caused by this incident.

72. The medical officer tied the epidemic to the rite of *Ganga Pujan* ("Ganges worship"), which he characterized as bearing "the seeds of death." Pilgrims performed this upon their return home, and part of the ritual was to drink (possibly contaminated) Ganges water brought from Hardwar.

73. The enormous task confronting the sanitary authorities can be seen from the testimony that in 1891 Hardwar had only one permanent latrine (HMI, Jan. 1892: 39). Many of these organizational measures have continued since then, including the sector organization.

74. The *akhara*s still have this sense of ritual primacy, despite clearly losing real power. In 1998, the Kumbha Mela administrators stressed that their purpose was to serve the *akhara*s, but the events just prior to the main bathing day clearly showed where power lay. Not only did the authorities cancel the bathing processions to prevent conflict between the *akhara*s—though the ban was later rescinded—but also they deployed heavily armed troops to quell any possible resistance.

75. There are itemized accounts for several Melas (HMI Jan. 1892: 36, 51, 54; Sept. 1903: 25). The 1867 total cost is greater than its parts because certain costs were not listed (N/L) in the later reports.

	1867	1879	1891	1903
Medical	N/L	2,346	2,957	4,934
Conservancy	N/L	3,941	19,610	21,687
Communications (Bridges)	27,830	18,945	26,870	21,472
Police	14,147	12,527	16,878	21,616
Collections	N/L	890	1,305	1,600
Miscellaneous	N/L	686	1,356	1,857
Totals	56,666	39,335	68,975	73,166

76. Epidemic cholera had plagued the 1879 Mela, and the Sanitary Commissioner's remarks show how much officials wanted to avoid this in 1891 (HMI Jan. 1892: 22–28).

77. The 1903 report lists receipts of 19,593 rupees, expenses of 73,166, and a fair fund balance of 42,142, leaving a deficit of 11,431 to be advanced by the government.

78. This is an extract from the Allahabad *Pioneer* of 12 October 1893.

79. Some sort of contained supply would have been necessary after the railway was extended to Dehra Dun in 1900. The railway line passes between Bhim Ghoda and the Ganges on an elevated viaduct, and any open supply channel would have eroded the viaduct's foundations.

80. The *Pioneer* article claims that the government funded these improvements, whereas the gazetteer credits the Hardwar Improvement Society.

81. Such civic organizations continued into the twentieth century. In 1908, a *panda* named Tarachand Sharma authored a pamphlet to acquaint his readers with Hardwar's sacred sites and history. The pamphlet opened and closed with an appeal for donations to the "Haridwar Brahmakund Fund" to improve the bathing area; the pamphlet claims the decision to establish the fund came from a meeting of all Hardwar's *panda*s (1908: 49). Such improvements were also clearly in his interest, since the Mahavaruni inquiry describes him as owning a temple at Har-ki-Pairi (HMI Dec. 1892: 114).

82. The Mahavaruni festival occurs when a Varuni festival falls on a Saturday, a Varuni fair being when *shatabhisak nakshatra*, one of the 27 "lunar mansions," falls on the thirteenth day in the dark half of Chaitra (Tripathi 1978: 313). These conditions lead one to believe the festival would be uncommon, and in fact. the 1892 fair was the first one in twenty-seven years.

83. The petition from the secretary of the Calcutta Indian Association claims that the hiatus had been thirty-seven years (ibid., p. 19), but Swamikannu Pillai's ephemeris (1987: 186) clearly shows that twenty-seven is correct. The available documents make it difficult to judge whether this action was justified. The Calcutta Indian Association's petition alleges that there were only four cases of cholera on March 22 and 23, which makes it seem that the government overreacted (HMI, July 1892: 3). Yet later reports mention that the cholera from this fair caused a terrible epidemic, which makes the situation seem far more serious (HMI Sept. 1903: 10).

84. In addition to the lost gifts, the magistrate noted that many *panda*s and *gosain*s owned lodging houses and would have suffered lost income. Lodging house owners were already steaming over the government-set occupancy limits; one man complained that a building capable of housing 500 people had been licensed for only 167 (HMI Dec. 1892: 198).

85. The magistrates admitted that there may have been police corruption, although no officers were charged.

86. HMI Dec. 1893: 21. There were 28 ascetics among the 130 local witnesses, but the *panda*s were the most important group.

87. In his court testimony, one *panda* explicitly stated he was sure the policemen were Muslims, since the government would deploy these "to destroy the Hindu religion" (HMI Dec. 1892: 106).

88. This is an extract from the Allahabad *Pioneer* of 12 October 1893.

89. Official records specifically mention the June 10 Ganga Dashahara festival. I infer that the other was a Somavati Amavasya on May 31.

90. Since the Jammu ruler meant for each *panda* to receive one rupee, this means that there were 2,500 *panda*s in Hardwar at the time.

91. In March 1898, plague measures caused further conflict when local people assaulted two British medical officers who had gone to examine an infected brahmin. The root issue here seems to have been brahmin sanctity, since the trouble arose when the officers tried to take him bodily to a hospital. No one was hurt, but the assailants were sent to jail (HMI May 1898: 4–5).

92. The telegram was sent by Pandit Tarachand, whom the Mahavaruni inquiry identifies as owning one of Har-ki-Pairi's temples, and who also authored the pamphlet *Haridvara-Darpana*.

93. The 1903 Kumbha Mela report repeats this nearly verbatim (HMI Sept. 1903: 17).

94. The summary of the Mahavaruni inquiry (HMI Dec. 1992) contains considerable detail about *sanyasi* ownership. Both Ganpat Gir (p. 198) and Mangal Gir (p. 45) testified that they owned lodging houses. Charan Singh, the man the soldiers were accused of murdering, was an ex-tenant of Gokulgir Gusain (p. 50). The map of Har-ki-Pairi from the Mahavaruni inquiry (p. 85) shows that Ghan Shyam Puri owned two temples there, and Jayd[a]yal Gir owned a third. The report also mentions that Balwant Gir was suing the government for compensation for land use during the 1891 Kumbha Mela (p. 50). The 1903 Kumbha Mela report (Sep. 1903: 5) identifies Balwant Gir as the *mahant* of Raiwala and the owner of Laljiwala Island, upon which pilgrims camped during the 1891 and 1903 Kumbha Melas.

95. They were only narrowly behind the second landowners in the district.

96. Supplements to the *Saharanpur District Gazetteer*s in 1917, 1924, and 1934 all mention the gradually eroding status of landed families but do not mention the *akhara*s, hinting that they had been able to retain their position. Unlike the *sanyasi*s and Udasis, the *bairagi*s seem to have been outsiders. Raper reported that they were expelled from Hardwar after 1760, and although this claim is belied by Hardwicke's report that there were *bairagi*s at the 1796 Kumbha Mela, they were clearly a marginal group in Hardwar. The 1903 Kumbha Mela report notes that unlike the other *akhara*s,

the *bairagis* did not have a permanent place to stay in Hardwar (HMI Sept. 1903: 17). They now have two ashrams in Sharvan Nath Nagar, a section of Hardwar first developed in the 1950s.

97. The map from the Mahavaruni inquiry identifies Jaydayal Gir as owning one of the temples at Har-ki-Pairi, so he was clearly an influential man.

98. The surname "Das" ("servant") indicates that this ascetic was a Vaishnava.

99. The account in the almanac handed out by the Ganga Sabha claims that the local *pandas* and *mahants* were immediately dissatisfied with this plan and that the two groups led a campaign against this (*Shri Ganga Tithi Parva Nirnaya* 1990: 9). This conflicts with the British account, which reports that the first opposition came from a *mahant* in Dehra Dun.

100. Parmanand (1985: 245) infers that this platform is the concrete "island" opposite Har-ki-Pairi, but since this platform is described as extending almost the town's entire length, a more probable guess is the masonry platform extending from Har-ki-Pairi to Gau *ghat*.

101. Prior (1993: 39, 45) notes the colonial government's penchant for working with "respectable gentlemen" (that is, people like them) and allowing them to speak for the whole Hindu community, and this seems to have taken place here.

102. The Sabha sent copies to the princes of Udaipur, Jaipur, Mysore, Travancore, Indore, Bikaner, Alwar, Gwalior, Jammu and Kashmir, and Darbhanga.

103. To prevent further misunderstandings, the memorialists hired a retired engineer to give technical advice at the conference. For their part, government officials were surprised that the protest arose two years after construction had begun, during which time the works had been there for everyone to see (HMI Oct. 1916: 2).

104. Under the agreement, Supply Channel Number One was to supply most of the water to the Hardwar *ghats*. This channel is now practically stagnant—probably due to shoaling at the head—and the water to the *ghats* comes via the Bhim Ghoda weir.

105. Any water lost at Hardwar could still be channeled into the Lower Ganges Canal at Narora, but any water lost at Narora would flow down to the sea.

106. GAD 231/1926 Box 465/April 1929/Serial #27: 25–26. Christie describes his efforts to reason with Malviya as "futile"—which makes Christie seem either unable or unwilling to recognize that Malviya saw this as a deliberate falsehood.

107. In going directly to the governor, Christie disregarded the usual chain of command, which seems to indicate panic, and this brought some criticism in the official reports.

108. The Meerut Division Commissioner thought it was unnecessary for Mela officials to clear the pool for the *akharas*, since pilgrims fled before them "like minnows before a pike" (GAD 231/1926 Box 465/April 1929/Serial #15: 27).

109. The oldest *dharamshala* was built in 1890 by Seth Suraj Mal, the Calcutta millionaire behind the 1893 Mahavaruni affair. The *dharamshala* inscriptions always stress the donors' pious motives, but such largesse would have given the donors considerable status, as well as year-round income from the shops on the ground floor.

110. The 1927 Mela had an estimated 900,000 people, the largest since 1867 (SDG 1934: 18), whereas the 1938 crowd was estimated at one million (Forbes 1939: 301).

111. Durga Datta Pant, the school's founder, also wrote tracts defending traditional Hindu practice—a booklet in praise of the Hardwar *panda*s in 1909 and a booklet describing the rituals for pilgrimage places in 1912.

112. An ornate gateway standing on the land opposite the Rishikul records that in 1915 a resident of Bikaner donated 48 *bigha*s of land to the institution. Dvivedi's pamphlet also describes the Rishikul, with an appeal to pious Hindus for donations (1927: 6).

113. Hardwar's population jumped by 41 percent between 1941 and 1951 (from 40,823 to 57,338), and less than 5 percent in 1961, to 59,960 (SDG 1981: 373); this clearly shows the affect of Partition.

114. One elderly man related that immigrants with money opened shops and stands, while those with none took in laundry. Women sold grass and wood gathered in the forest, and children sold sweets or newspapers at the bus stand after school. Yet although he respected their energy and industriousness, he also conveyed that they were crowding and dominating the local people.

115. The census lists populations as 91,371 in 1971 and 145,946 in 1981 (both 1982: 373), 187,174 in 1991 (1991: 56), and 220,767 in 2001 (2004 3:62).

116. The people running less successful temples are distinctly aware that they are at a disadvantage. Bhim Ghoda's owner lamented that he wanted to face his temples with marble to make them more attractive but that he didn't have the money to do so.

CHAPTER 4

1. Marriot uses food exchange patterns in an Indian village to map the status of different groups. He then distills these patterns into four transactional strategies—maximal, minimal, optimal, and pessimal—which he applies to Indian social, political, economic, and religious life. His basic model—a high end and a low end, with nodes to each side of the center—is general enough to fit most cases, but it does have difficulties. Regional status differences make every map essentially local, as he acknowledges in his remarks on sectarian minorities (1976: 127–28). A more serious problem is the notion that a group's members all share the same transaction patterns. Jameson stresses that acceptance patterns for Hardwar's *panda*s seem contextual and can be influenced by the desire to please a particular client (1976: 25, 329–30, 354).

2. The most obvious example is *darshan*, the interactive "seeing" between deity and devotee, in which the devotee offers gifts to the deity and receives *prasad* in return. Other potential examples are interactions between guru and disciple, *panda* and pilgrim, and ascetic and householder—not to mention buyers and sellers in the marketplace.

3. These texts promise enormous religious benefits for simple ritual actions, such as bathing, almsgiving, and funereal ceremonies. Such promises are a way to magnify the site's inherent holiness but could also have helped to drum up donations.

4. Many pilgrimage texts have passages devaluing a mechanical stress on ritual action and stressing the need for sincerity. Pilgrims are well aware of both messages, as chapter 7 discusses.

5. Bharat Heavy Electricals (B.H.E.L.) manufactures turbines; Indian Drugs and Pharaceuticals Limited (I.D.P.L.) manufactures allopathic drugs; Ayurvedic medicines are manufactured both by the Gurukul Kangri's Ayurvedic medicine factory and more recently Swami Ramdev's organization.

6. The *Census of India* gives telling signs of Hardwar's dependence on the pilgrim trade. The 1971 census lists its most important export as Ganges water, even though religious groups stress that this should not be sold (1972: 14). The 1981 census changes the main export to Ayurvedic drugs, but the principal import was brass vessels for Ganges water (1982: 394). More recent census reports no longer list these categories, but one can make some inferences based on the available data. Only 23 percent of the workers in Hardwar district are engaged in cultivation, versus a statewide average of just over 50 percent, and many of Uttarakhand's other districts top 70 percent (2004 2:lxii). Although the Hardwar district's 63.7 percent literacy rate is the lowest in the entire state, the 82.5 percent literacy rate in the Hardwar urban area clearly points to a more developed economy (2004 2:lx, 62–63).

7. In 1990, the top ten types of businesses in the two major market streets were eating places, clothing, women's ornaments and cosmetics, blankets, brassware, puffed rice for *prasad*, general stores (foodstuffs), woodwork, toys, and tours and travel. These numbers could be updated, but there is no reason to suspect that their proportion would be radically different.

8. Many factors influence demand, including politics. Since 1990, unrest in Kashmir has channeled traffic to the Himalayas as an alternate hot-season destination, and the increased demand has also allowed hotel keepers to raise their prices.

9. This Punjabi prevalence meant that security was very tight in the early 1990s, due to worries about Sikh separatists. Although the threat from Sikh militancy has declined, security remains tight at these large festivals—partly because Hardwar is considered a prime soft target for radical Islamic terrorism, and partly because of the more general need for crowd control.

10. These temples officially open on astrologically determined auspicious days, but in some cases, one finds that the temples are officially "open," but the roads leading up to them are still blocked by snow.

11. During July and August, families with school-age children must plan around the school schedule, which largely limits such families to weekend trips.

12. Bhardwaj (1973: 216–24) devotes an entire chapter to Hardwar's pilgrim visitation patterns.

13. More detailed consideration of these festivals' religious significance is in chapter 7. The focus here is on their importance to Hardwar's economy and the local people's livelihood.

14. Some merchants offer festival discounts, whereas others simply take advantage of each festival's niche needs. During the July 1996 *kanvar* festival, I noticed large racks of cassette tapes for sale in a sewing machine shop!

15. These latter occasions draw crowds for very different reasons. Eclipses are highly inauspicious times, against which a Ganges bath is one means of protection,

whereas a Somavati Amavasya is considered highly auspicious, which amplifies the benefits of any religious action.

16. For a "full" Kumbha Mela Jupiter is in Aquarius, whereas six years later the "half" Kumbha Mela has Jupiter in Leo. The full Kumbha Melas have elaborate ceremonial bathing processions of the organized ascetic groups (*akharas*), whereas the half Kumbha Mela has only householders. During Hardwar's "half" Kumbha Mela, the *akhara*s are all in Ujjain, to attend the Kumbha Mela there.

17. During a "full" Kumbha Mela, Shaiva ascetic processions bathe on Shivaratri, Chaitra Amavasya (the new moon in the lunar month of Chaitra), and the Kumbh day (now April 14); Vaishnava ascetics bathe on the second and third of these days and then on the full moon after the Kumbh day (Vaisakh Purnima). Since 1938, the state government has been responsible for both running and financially underwriting the Kumbha Mela. The government Mela authority publishes an official list of bathing days (starting on Makara Sankranti on January 14), although some of these official bathing days draw only sparse crowds.

18. Even during the Kumbha Mela, many factors affect pilgrim crowds. The 1998 Kumbha Mela began during what was usually described as the coldest winter in twenty-four years, and this dampened people's interest. A riot between competing *akhara*s on the second bathing day (and worries about future violence) kept the crowds low until the very last days. Finally, the time interval between the second and the climactic bathing day can range between a few days to a few weeks, and the shorter intervals tend to draw bigger crowds (since visitors can attend two important festival days during one journey).

19. In summer 1996, a smaller carnival was also set up outside the grounds of Kankhal's Daksha temple, perhaps to amuse children while their elders worshipped.

20 See White (1838: 108, 105).

21. The *Gazetteer* (1909: 157) describes them as "professional poisoners" and notes that "in all cases *dhatura* has been the poison invariably employed."

22. These people are clearly locals, and the distinctive way in which the women tie their saris leads me to believe that they belong to a particular group. The market price for these genuine articles is thousands of rupees, and they usually asked for fifty-one rupees, which means that they can cheat only the ignorant or the gullible.

23. If this latter allegation is true—and I heard only the owner's side—this sort of fraud would have made the owner liable for a forty thousand rupee penalty, his advertised reward for fake merchandise. Yet even before hearing about this, it had become clear that they were not being absolutely truthful about their relationship.

24. "Commission" has become an English loan-word into Hindi; it is in quotation marks because the semantic field is a little different from the English meaning of "a salesman's fee." The Hindi usage can include this meaning, but more commonly it refers to a finder's fee, a kickback for bringing customers to a business.

25. In 1989, he paid the rickshaw men 90 rupees commission for a 250-rupee room and 45 rupees for a 110-rupee room. By 2004, room prices had risen by about a third, and so had the commissions. He accepted commissions as part of the cost of

doing business, since without them, no driver would bring people unless specifically requested. For the travel business, commissions were about 10 percent of the ticket cost.

26. Here again, one sees the distinction between goods and price. Misrepresenting one's goods is seen as patently dishonest, whereas the price is highly negotiable.

27. See the beginning of the "Textual Reports" section in chapter 2; recall, too, that MPM 10–11 were exclusively devoted to the praise of gift giving.

28. In contrast, one finds very few beggars (and, for that matter, very few *sadhus*) at more conventional vacation spots such as hill stations, where the local economy does not support them.

29. For example, in October 1989, the festival of "Chandi's fourteenth" drew large pilgrim crowds to the Chandi Devi temple, and beggars lined a normally deserted path. The opening of the Chandi Devi ropeway in 1998 not only increased pilgrim traffic to the temple but also created a convenient point to intercept this traffic.

30. These marginal people often have connections with better established businesspeople. The blind singer took his bag of change to a nearby shopkeeper, who would give him the equivalent in larger bills. Aside from doing a good deed, the merchant was also getting the man's change, which was chronically short in Hardwar.

31. Gifts of food are not restricted to human beings. They can also include feeding the cattle that wander around Hardwar and the fish swimming near Har-ki-Pairi.

32. I witnessed one such moment in 1998 when I saw a neighbor lady—who is by no means wealthy—give some chapatis and vegetables to an ascetic who had been waiting patiently outside her door.

33. More than two hundred years ago, Raper commented on this cumulative effect, noting that one popular means of dispensing charity (and thus generating religious merit) was to station people along the road to give out drinking water to passersby (1979: 456).

34. Of course, some people sponsor such affairs motivated less by religious piety than by the desire to create or maintain their status in the community.

35. Such public acts reinforced their image as humble, pious people, and this may have brought practical benefits. Bayly notes (1983: 385–89) that pious expenditures by merchant families helped to reinforce their creditworthiness, precisely by displaying their piety. Yet the Advaita Puri residents have my genuine respect, since despite their wealth, they were willing to serve others.

36. The oldest such institution seems to be the Guru Nanak *langar*, since Jameson (1976: 316) mentions this one but no others. I was told that it was run by local Sikhs, and the *langar* or free kitchen is one of the Sikh community's central institutions.

37. The most unusual *annakshetra* was a local restaurant that solicited donations to feed the poor. Since I saw this only in the hot season, this may have been an ingenious way to get rid of food that would have spoiled by morning, without having to give it away for nothing.

38. This is not to say that Hardwar's beggars have an easy life: they suffer greatly from heat in summer and cold in winter and receive a year-round diet of abuse.

39. When I told one persistent beggar to go to an *annakshetra*, he informed me—with a genuinely mortified look—that he was a brahmin and could not eat at such places.

40. See Salomon (1985: 437–39). Such anathemas obviously protected the interests of their brahmin authors, but recent scholarship clearly shows brahmin ambivalence toward accepting gifts and the awareness that this could endanger their status (see Parry 1980: 102–06; van der Veer 1989: 197–211).

41. In her study of gift giving in a north Indian village, Raheja explores both the notion of inauspiciousness (*ashubh* or *nashubh*) and the strategies for dealing with it. She describes it (1988: 42) as the "qualities and substances that themselves are the causes, or more precisely, the embodiments, of ill-being." Inauspiciousness can be generated, especially by malignant astrological conjunctions, but it cannot be destroyed. It can only be redistributed, usually by giving it away through the medium of gifts.

42. The clearest example came during an eclipse in 1990. An eclipse is considered a highly inauspicious time, and during the eclipse, groups of beggars roamed the streets calling for "eclipse alms" (*grahan dan*), as a way to divert that moment's ill fortune to them.

43. This is probably what happened when a genuine receipt book was stolen from the Janki Bai Orphanage, near Har-ki-Pairi on Subhash Ghat.

44. They generally solicit quite openly, and it is not at all uncommon for institutions to post a notice detailing their proposed projects and to suggest that one make an endowment in the name of some departed relative.

45. Mulchand gives several examples of such endowments: the original Daksha temple was built by the Rani of Landour in 1810; the Chandi Devi temple was built in 1829 by the Jammu ruler Suchet Singh, and the temples at Vishnu Ghat were built by Raja Man Singh of Lucknow (1904: 64, 62, and 60, respectively). Until the middle of the nineteenth century royal clients were the wealthiest and thus the most desirable patrons. Social changes since then have eroded their wealth—though not their status—and made industrialists and businessmen the most desirable patrons.

46. A clear example is Seth Suraj Mal, who not only built the first large *dharamshala* in Hardwar but also helped to fund two other large public projects: in 1925, he helped fund the restoration of the concrete island across from Har-ki-Pairi, and in 1937, he and another man donated 100,000 rupees to lay marble on Har-ki-Pairi.

47. The plaques in question were on the stairway leading to the Mansa Devi temple, and they date from the mid-1970s, when 101 rupees would have been a far more significant sum. Another such case is the Bharat Mata Mandir: although the primary donor gave 1, 111, 111 rupees, plaques at the site listed hundreds of smaller donors, some giving only a few hundred rupees.

48. The availability of ready-made images means that one can create a shrine "on demand"—one installs a few ready-made images, and the temple is ready. These ready-made images were very common in Hardwar's temples, and their presence in a temple was one good indication that a temple was fairly new.

49. Elemental mercury is liquid, so this *linga* must be some sort of compound. In Indian alchemy, mercury symbolizes semen, maleness, the moon, and ultimately

Shiva himself. The "chief guest" at the *linga*'s consecration was Giani Zail Singh, then president of India, whose participation brought the site considerable status, but this also meant that the true date could not be hidden.

50. This temple has become a regular stop on local sightseeing tours, and it seems plausible that the ashram's management made a deal with tour operators to stop there on their way to the Daksha temple.

51. Although it has declined, it will never be completely abandoned, since it is owned by the Juna *akhara*, whose members actually live there.

52. The latter two are away from the main tourist areas, but the Kangra temples are literally a stone's throw from Har-ki-Pairi, which makes their decline much harder to explain.

53. These claims are often simply stated outright—even though many donors clearly see the economic interests behind these claims—but are sometimes quite subtle, as in my experience at the Narayani Shila temple. The *pujari* there made no request of any kind, but he talked at length about the importance of one's *karma* as one's only lasting legacy.

54. The temple has a sign claiming that this is the place where Sati's navel had fallen. This seems to be a local tradition with no textual support, but it is also true that the lists of the fifty-one *shaktipitha*s are not consistent.

55. The sums requested usually reflect an estimate of the donor's means and position and are a definite appeal to vanity.

56. For instance, one family selling a house in 1989 received 175,000 rupees in "white" money and 225,000 in "black." This family used this black money to marry a son and a daughter—50,000 rupees for the former, and about three times that for the latter. In another case, a man had sold some land near Rishikesh to a swami, who had given him the purchase price in cash—800,000 rupees.

57. Baba Haridas noted that in many cases people would donate a certain percentage of their income to religious causes, as a way to buy spiritual merit and absolve themselves from sin. Such people are literally giving kickbacks to God.

58. These programs can also serve as fund-raising opportunities. One of the most humorous things I saw the during the 1998 Kumbha Mela was a "PBS pledge-drive style" Ram Lila—in which the dramatic performance was regularly interrupted by appeals to the audience for money and exclamations of acclamation for each donation ("and we've just gotten ten rupees from Mrs. Gupta, thank you so much! Be sure to make donation soon, so that the show can continue!").

59. Pages 47–57 of Lise McKean's *Divine Enterprise* (1996) discuss the ashrams of the Gayatri Parivar's Shri Ram Sharma and the Manav Seva Utthan Samiti's Satpal Maharaj.

60. On the spiritual level, Advaita Puri delegated religious authority to his own guru, Mahadev Puri Jalalwala, to whose photo he performed daily worship. As Miller and Wertz have noted (1996: 145), corporate institutions tend to have far more elaborate institutional controls than noncorporate ones, and the swami probably insisted on incorporation to guarantee such oversight.

61. As one example, I was told that sculptural images should receive *arati* four times every day, whereas pictures require only two.

62. Before his marriage, he cooked these meals himself (except when some of the visiting ladies would take on these duties), but since his marriage in 1993, his wife has all done the cooking.

CHAPTER 5

1. In 1990, people running the stalls selling flowers and *prasad* at Har-ki-Pairi paid annual rents between 75,000 and 125,000 rupees, depending on the location, and I would not be surprised if the cost has more than doubled by now. This rent gave one the rights to a patch of ground, on which one could build as one liked. Given such high rents, and given that each transaction is only a few rupees, these businesses must have phenomenal sales volume.

2. As discussed in chapter 2, the HDM shows a pronounced ascetic bias, whereas the MPM's emphasis on rituals and brahmin sanctity clearly favors the *panda*s.

3. One of the few temples actually owned by *panda*s is the Narayani Shila temple (Jameson 1976: 94); this is a very old site but so far off the beaten track that it brings little patronage.

4. Vidyarthi (1978) describes the *panda*s as a class of sacred specialists in Gaya, whereas van der Veer (1989) studied the *panda*s of Ayodhya. Jameson's study was her DPhil thesis at the University of Oxford (1976). It examined Hardwar's *panda*s in their private lives as a brahmin community—in which they are very similar to many other brahmin groups—and in their public lives as pilgrim guides. Her account's rich detail reveals her privileged access, yet this closeness sometimes diminishes her critical distance, particularly with regard to how *panda*s' traditional values and economic interests coincide.

5. Amarnath, who came from a Badrinath *panda* family, reported that his family had the rights to pilgrims from Garhwal, from parts of Bihar, and from the Gwalior princely state.

6. This trend was very helpful while I was viewing *panda* records at the National Archives: pages written in a single hand (the *panda*'s) were usually the oldest.

7. Ann Gold (1989: 206–7) describes a Hardwar *panda* needing several tries before finding the genuine lineage.

8. Until his son was born in 2002, one *panda* friend found himself in this quandary.

9. Goswamy (1966) describes using these records to trace the migrations of an eighteenth-century family of miniature painters.

10. This genealogical interest stems from the LDS belief that church members can confer church membership on their deceased ancestors. The originals are taken to the society's Utah headquarters, but another copy is deposited in India's National Archives.

11. Tinesh Kalra, interview, 10 August 1990. Aside from Hardwar, the Genealogical Society was working in Thanesar and Kurukshetra, though later in 1990, the project was suspended.

12. Microfilm 5426 began with a copy of the contract in English and Hindi, in which the society agreed to pay twenty-five paise per page. This sum seems trivial until one realizes the volume involved. One *panda* submitted 139 rolls of film, which by my rough estimate would have earned him almost 100,000 rupees, no small sum in 1990.

13. Jameson's list of lineage origin places is eye-opening: thirty-five *panda* lineages came from within 25 miles of Hardwar, seventeen more lineages from within 50 miles, thirteen from within 100 miles, seven from within 150 miles, and seven from more than 200 miles (1976: 101–2).

14. Mulchand, a Kankhal schoolmaster, claimed that Hardwar's original residents were ascetics. Their presence drew householders seeking *darshan* and instruction, who gave the ascetics provisions and gifts. Seeing this, local brahmins established themselves as pilgrim guides, began to take gifts, and kept records to monopolize their right to particular clients. As evidence, Mulchand cites a 15 December 1883 decision of the Deoband *diwani adalat* ("district court"), which he claims reports this pattern.

15. Bayly (1981: 166; 1983: 136n). The earlier source dates the earliest ledger books in 1680, whereas the later sets them fifteen years earlier. Copperplate inscriptions were for only the most important clients (e.g., royalty); humbler clients had to make do with paper.

16. Amado's estimate is closest to mine: 150–200 years old (1976: 965). Goswami describes the records as going back "three hundred fifty years or so" (1966: 175) but could trace a particular family for only 250 years (1966: 179). Jameson (1976: 342) says that many records "appeared" to be three or four hundred years old but does not say how she formed this judgment. The earliest estimate is Mulchand's (1904: 34), who reports that entries begin about 1575. Mulchand stresses the importance of Raja Man Singh's patronage as the source for Hardwar's importance, and he may have picked this date to correspond with Man Singh's era.

17. Some agents are brahmin "migrant laborers" hired for their ritual abilities. Maithili brahmins from Bihar have good Sanskrit pronunciation and a tradition of learning, and they work for low wages, since their home region is dirt-poor. As with many temps, they have no job security and are entitled to serve pilgrims solely on behalf of the "genuine" *panda*s.

18. This dilemma is especially acute for Himalayan pilgrimage sites, given the short pilgrimage season there. In 2005, one Badrinath *panda* described their earning season as a mere six weeks. One coping strategy has been for the men in a *panda* family to stagger vacation time from their day jobs so that someone is always present to serve their clients.

19. In arranging for these needs, *panda*s patronize local shopkeepers and thus are also "eating" commissions, like many other people in Hardwar. From the *panda*'s perspective, of course, it would be foolish to send his client to a shop that did not reward him.

20. Jameson (1976: 383–86). The basket is filled with cosmetics, ornaments, cloth, sweets, and *dakshina*—the first two items symbolizing an auspicious married state, since they are forbidden for widows, whereas the others are gifts for the *panda*.

21. Parry (1980) describes the elaborate arrangements in Benares for dividing up the rights to perform the death ceremonies for people who have come to die there—arrangements largely lacking in Hardwar, which processes only local dead.

22. Ann Gold points out (1989: 87n) incongruities from this new practice—after accompanying a pilgrim to immerse the ashes in the Ganges, which grants the dead final release, they returned home to complete the rest of the death ceremonies.

23. According to Hsuan Tsang, "If a man dies and his bones are cast into the [Ganges] river, he cannot fall into an evil way; whilst he is carried by its waters and forgotten by men, his soul is preserved in safety on the other side" (1969: 188).

24. See Ann Gold (1989: 209–10); Jameson also describes one *panda*'s tour to visit clients in Haryana and Punjab (1976: 355–62).

25. As Amarnath described it, his Badrinath *panda* family would spend several days taking care of their clients before seeking gifts and would ideally have several clients present to make gift giving a status opportunity. Yet despite his contempt for *panda*s, he also stressed their obligations: "If you have money, they will try to get it, and if not it is their duty to help you."

26. I heard this particular story from a Delhi electrical goods merchant named Hans Kashyap; he reported that the incident took place in 1941.

27. See Parry (1980: 102–6), van der Veer (1989: 189–211), and Raheja (1988).

28. *Panda* actions have themselves undermined this distinction. Mahabrahmans have the hereditary right to the "secret gifts" cast into the Ganges, which are considered inauspicious because they are obtained while treading on the bones and ashes of the dead. Jameson reports the *panda*s sued to gain a share of these but lost the case (1976: 315–16). Amado (1976: 963) reports that the *panda*s could scoop up any gifts that were still sinking in the water, but anything on the bottom belonged to the Mahabrahmans. Both report greater conflict during major festivals, when traffic (and giving) tends to rise.

29. Parry (1980: 93) notes that one reason for the Mahabrahmans' inauspiciousness is that they are literally believed to have become the deceased person and that the funeral priests for Nepali aristocrats solidify this identification by eating some of the deceased's ground-up bones.

30. My landlord respectfully refused to rent a room to some people carrying such remains and made it clear that one did not take such things into one's home. For the *panda*s, this risk is part of their obligation to serve their clients.

31. This was followed by an animated debate over the coconut—the client wanted to put it in the Ganges, as something that had been used in the ritual, whereas the officiant was reluctant to do this, since a coconut is a valuable item. In the end, the client placed the coconut in the Ganges right beside the *ghat*, and the officiant scooped it up two feet later. Both men laughed at this, but each had attained his end: the client had disposed of all ritual articles, and the officiant had retained the coconut for future use.

32. Hardwar and some other *tirtha*s have licensed government stands selling fresh *bhang*. The stand and its product are absolutely legal, but the social stigma remains.

33. In 1989–90, there was a government-run *bhang* stand on Gau Ghat—the Indian government runs official drug-dispensing stands at certain pilgrimage sites—but in the ensuing years, the stand has disappeared (or has such a low profile that it cannot be found easily). This disappearance reflects both changing social attitudes toward drug consumption and the desire to promote Hardwar as a more upscale pilgrimage place.

34. Apte's description (1978: 935) of a brahmin's six duties (*shatkarman*) includes these, as well as sponsoring and performing sacrifices.

35. Printed sources reflect these divergent views. Fonia (1987: 33) describes *panda*s as "highly conversant with Hindu ritualism and … learned Pandits," whereas the 1981 *District Gazetteer* (340) states that "what makes [Hardwar] unattractive is *Panda* (Brahmana), the intermediary between man and his maker, a thriving and most materialistic trader in the spiritual life."

36. The most prominent example is the Purohit Lodge, which is owned by a prominent *panda* and sits directly behind Har-ki-Pairi. The upper floors have hotel rooms, and the ground floor has various service establishments—a restaurant, a tea and cold drink stall, and a store selling woolen goods, brass vessels, and woodwork.

37. The owner has explained that the dome was shaped like an umbrella (*chatari*) and thus the colloquial name for the temple is "Man Singh's *chatari*." This has been confused with a slightly different word meaning "funeral shrine" (*chatri*), which has led some to claim that this temple houses Man Singh's ashes. This claim is belied by evidence from a Rajasthani historian, who notes that the only such monuments to Man Singh are near Hyderabad and in his ancestral home near Jaipur.

38. According to one source, the *panda*s consider this Maharashtrian family the temple's caretakers rather than its owners and, on this basis, could claim both that carrying out this renovation exceeded their authority and that others were entitled to a share of the offerings.

39. When I asked one *panda* what was said during Ganga Puja, he respectfully declined to answer and explained that the mantras should be spoken only during worship.

40. *Shri Ganga Tirtha Parva Nirnaya* (1990: 11). Hardwar is still seen as a "pure" place, as shown by the local bans on liquor and nonvegetarian food.

41. *Panda*s see Hardwar as a center for purity and orthopraxy, whereas the surrounding regions—Punjab, the hills, and Delhi—show less concern for endogamy, widow remarriage, blood sacrifice, vegetarianism, and liquor (Jameson 1976: 37).

42. As suggested in chapter 3, settling outside Hardwar may have also reflected the *panda*s' desire to have their homes and families in a place outside *sanyasi* control.

43. Jameson (1976: 43) reports the fishing ban in 1863; the Saharanpur Magistrate's order (inscribed on a Kushavarta flagstone) is dated June 1864. Fishing complaints reappear several different times: soldiers were alleged to have killed fish at Har-ki-Pairi during the 1892 Mahavaruni Fair (HMI, Dec. 1892: 27), and there was an "agitation" over a "fishing incident" after the Viceroy's visit to Rishikesh (HMI, July 1917, Pol. 33). In 1916, a second crusade sought to remove prostitutes living on the road to the Daksha temple, in houses owned by *sanyasi mahant*s (Jameson 1976: 44).

Jameson also notes repeated attempts to ban the slaughter and sale of meat, although as late as 1938, Forbes reports eating mutton in a restaurant near Har-ki-Pairi (1939: 308).

44. *Shri Ganga Tirtha Parva Nirnaya* (1990: 11). Jameson reports that this happened in 1937 (1976: 46). From the Sabha's contemporary perspective, of course, the precise date is less important than the story it reports.

45. *Shri Ganga Tirtha Parva Nirnaya* (1990: 11). Jameson (1976: 44) reports that this first happened immediately after independence, and again in 1962, when *panda* pressure forced a newly opened Hardwar shop to close.

46. The 1927 Kumbha Mela crowd was estimated at 900,000, and at one million in 1938. These were the largest crowds since 1867, which had an estimated 1.5 million.

47. Given the general qualities of many Indian film posters, such concern is hardly surprising. In practice, these advertisements are posted up to the edge of the *ghat*, and no further.

48. The 1990 almanac (*panchang*) details the lunar year (with auspicious and inauspicious times) and also contains the Sabha's history, statement of ideals, and a plea for donations. Combining all of these elements was an astute public relations move, since for religious reasons, most people would want the almanac. The printing costs were borne by a donor, and different groups have published it in recent years.

49. The photography ban may be to protect the modesty of women bathers, some of whom become exposed while bathing and changing. The problem does not seem to be photographing the site itself, since its image appears on countless postcards and photos.

50. The text of the *arati* and an exploration of its themes are in chapter 7.

51. Other public service organizations include the Mahavir Dal, Bharat Scouts and Guides, and the Seva Samiti ("Service Organization"). The first two help with crowd control during festivals, and the last does the same sort of social services as the Ganga Sabha: giving out food and medicine, traveler's aid, cremating paupers and unclaimed bodies, and arranging sewing classes so that local girls can learn a trade. As influential local men, *panda*s can be found serving as leaders in all of these bodies.

52. Jameson notes (1976: 88) that the Sabha receives two rupees a year from each of its members as a subscription fee, as well as some income from renting out umbrellas and wooden platforms on the *ghat*s. If one estimates the members at 2,500, this would produce five thousand rupees, which is a negligible sum. She gives no indication of how much the latter might raise, and I am convinced that most of their money comes from donations.

53. Seth Suraj Mal (who instigated the 1892 Mahavaruni Fair inquiry) helped to fund both the 1925 restoration and the 1937 expansion at Har-ki-Pairi. An inscription notes that the marble flooring for the latter cost 100,000 rupees, an immense sum at that time. In 1986, the Hinduja Foundation spent 3.5 million rupees to expand the ghat further and build the enclosed ladies' bathing *ghat*. Of course, such generous giving also brings great prestige to the donors.

54. The public address system and television-VCR unit were both donated in 1988. I believe that the silver image was donated during the 1986 Kumbha Mela, and

it must have been quite costly: the image is at least three feet high, and the workmanship finely detailed.

55. These particular requests were listed in the 1990 almanac (*Shri Ganga Tithi Parva Nirnaya* 16–17), and the last item is interesting, since the Sabha eventually halted renovation of the Ganga temple, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. That particular request seems to indicate that they were claiming some right to the temple's management, with which the temple's current owners would vehemently disagree.

56. Jameson reports (1976: 86–87) that the larger lineages send more representatives to the Sabha's General Committee and that the Sabha's president always comes from the Phirahedayin lineage, the largest of all. Hardwar's situation thus seems quite different from the situation van der Veer describes in Ayodhya, where two groups competed for pilgrims. In this latter case, a better location and more aggressive agents allowed one man to gain control over Ayodhya's *panda* network.

57. Despite wishes to discipline those who steal other people's clients, there is no effective mechanism for this. A more telling example is the rapid collapse of a subcommittee called *samaj sudhar* ("societal reformation"), formed in the 1950s to discipline *panda*s for violating communal norms (e.g., eating meat, drinking liquor, gambling, or visiting prostitutes). Family pressures meant that committee members took no action against their own relatives, and this lost them the respect they needed to implement this program (Jameson 1976: 89).

CHAPTER 6

1. The ten Dashanami "orders" are broadly divided into *dandi*s and *gosain*s (Sarkar n.d. 56). The *dandis* initiate only Brahmins and can be found in four of the ten Dashanami suborders—Sarasvati, Ashrama, Tirtha, and half of the Bharati orders. The *sanyasi akhara*s draw their members from the *gosain*s—who belong to the Giri, Puri, Sagar, Van, Aranya, Parvat, and the remaining Bharati orders—and who draw members from throughout Hindu caste society.

2. The current Kumbha Mela administration has retained this practice. The government subsidizes certain festival costs (electricity, water, and telephone), and the *akhara*s submit the list of qualifying members to the Mela administration.

3. The Niranjani *akhara* has clearly been preeminent at Hardwar, since its members bathe first at the Hardwar Kumbha Mela, its landholdings are the closest to Har-ki-Pairi, and its *mahant*s have considerable political capital.

4. Among the Sharvan Nath Nagar buyers were two groups of *bairagi* ascetics, showing that market forces trumped sectarian differences.

5. This number may have been deceptive, since I heard rumors that the Juna ranks on Chaitra Amavasya had been swelled with "one-day *baba*s"—local thugs hired to provide muscle in the Junas' bid to claim first place in the bathing order. The Vaishnava processions had far greater numbers, but these included lay devotees as well as ascetics.

6. For example, Pilot Baba became a Juna *akhara mandaleshvar* at the 1998 Kumbha Mela and reportedly paid a large sum of money for this honor.

7. Mines and Gaurishankar (1990) discuss how the Kanchipuram Shankaracharya fits the South Indian notion of figure known as the big-man Most commonly a political figure, the big-man uses charisma and organizational resources to reinforce his status by dispensing patronage.

8. In general, *sanyasi*s worship Shiva, wear red or saffron clothing (if they wear clothes at all), mark their foreheads with sacred ash in three horizontal lines, and use a *mala* ("rosary") made from *rudraksha* beads. *Bairagi*s worship Vishnu, wear yellow or white clothing (again, if they wear clothes, though Vaishnavas tend to eschew complete nudity), display vertical red and white or yellow forehead marks, and have rosaries and necklaces made of wood from the *tulsi* plant. Udasis dress more like *sanyasi*s but worship various deities. Mantras and rituals for each of these groups reflect their sectarian divisions.

9. Within orders, the strongest bond is usually between a guru and his (and, far more rarely, her) disciples; this binds the disciples into a loose "family," which often shares characteristic identifying marks or religious practices.

10. Van der Veer (1989: 178–80) discusses how establishing temples with fixed images influenced *rasik* organization along caste lines.

11. Sexual opportunity differs according to circumstances. Many Hardwar residents assume that the *mahant*s' wealth and power gives them access to women—should they desire such access—and one *mahant* lived openly with his mistress under the fiction that she was his disciple. The same is true for any ascetic with an international following, given their access to foreign women. Poor *sadhu*s may have homosexual relationships, and Sax notes that in colloquial Hindi the word *chela* ("disciple") refers to a person who is sodomized (2002: 103 n. 20).

12. Although this example mentions only one household, I have heard Mota Baba invoked by other people in Hardwar and as recently as November 2005.

13. This anonymity has also been affected by social change. During the 1998 Kumbha Mela, I met a Jammu *sanyasi* whose police-issued identity card listed his occupation as "*naga baba*"; he explained that identification was necessary because of the state's political instability. This case notwithstanding, most ascetics have categorically opposed proposals to receive government identity cards.

14. This same sense of displacement is one of the lasting traumas from Partition, which destroyed many of the social networks that allowed one to know who people really were.

15. Oman (1905: 235–38) describes how a pre-Independence political activist lived underground as a *sadhu* for six months and then resurfaced following an amnesty. I have earlier mentioned that a *sadhu* in Hardwar was alleged to have murdered two people.

16. In 1990, one *sadhu* sadly related that even though village people still gave *sadhu*s what they needed, they no longer welcomed them but instead wanted the *sadhu*s to move to another place.

17. He sneaked up behind me, snatched the glasses from my face, and then motioned for the camera. My instinctual response was to charge and knock him down, at which point a crowd gently restrained me and retrieved my glasses.

18. Mangal Das, interview, 25 April 1998.

19. In such contexts, being a scholar is often difficult—one ascetic assured me that becoming his disciple would bring me far greater benefits than a PhD.

20. Any divergence between life and message is suspicious, such as an ascetic who claimed he was devoted solely to singing the divine Name but then asked me to bring him batteries for his tape player.

21. Attributing power is a crucial difference among *sadhu*s themselves. Gross describes one *sadhu* as dividing ascetics into two classes: the *siddhapurush* ("accomplished man") had genuine spiritual power, whereas others merely took on the outward appearance (1992: 114–15).

22. The Niranjani *akhara* has substantial landholdings in downtown Hardwar, including several large hotels. As but one non-*sanyasi* example, one of the Ramanandi ashrams reportedly owns agricultural land worth an estimated 400 million rupees in Haryana state.

23. One exception to this pattern is the Bilvakeshvar temple, where offerings go directly to ascetics elected every six years, at the Kumbha Mela and the Ardha Kumbha Melas in Allahabad. Election is largely based on seniority, which ensures a long wait.

24. One ascetic said he had spent five years at Bilvakeshvar, but that the erratic winter livelihood eventually induced him to move to Indore, where he took up service at a Hanuman temple.

25. In 1990, these raids came at the beginning of the rainy season and seem to have been calculated to inflict maximal inconvenience. People continued to defend their spots, and after a week or so, when fear of a second raid had waned, they began to rebuild. During the 1998 Kumbha Mela, the authorities banned all structures on Rori Island to keep it clear for crowd control, and only a few determined ascetics opposed this by having shelters they could dismantle quickly.

26. The best example of this is the Keshav Ashram, the only permanent encroachment on Rori Island—in part because the original encroachment was in the 1850s. The name comes from Keshavanand, a *mahant* who gained control of the site in 1903 (GAD 305C: 2ff.).

27. The Shiva Annakshetra Bhandar is run by ascetics and claims to serve only ascetics, although for the untrained eye, it is difficult to distinguish an ascetic from a beggar.

28. This is very different from a *bhandara*, another sort of donated meal. Whereas *annakshetra* food is given as charity to all comers, a *bhandara* honors ascetics as guests, and the ascetics confer status on the donors by deigning to eat there.

29. Interestingly, ascetics at pilgrimage sites describe themselves as patrons rather than clients; they give their *darshan* to householders and then collect patronage as tribute (Gross 1992: 132).

30. The most engaging *baba* working the foreigners in 1990 was a South Indian from Pondicherry, who would tell me long stories about Hardwar's mythology and then request a fixed sum for a specific purpose (e.g., plastic for his roof). I eventually lost track of him, but just before I left Hardwar, I saw him talking animatedly with another foreigner.

31. Chapter 5 of *Divine Enterprise* discusses Satyamitrananda Giri's fundraising strategies and success, and how these are buttressed by traditional sources of authority.

32. For a description of this stone and its surroundings, see chapter 3.

33. The book was in the standard who's who format, with a photo and biographical data. Most of the entries were by *mahant*s, whose eagerness to buy a spot reveals their concern to display status and promote themselves at the Kumbha Mela, a prime patronage opportunity.

34. This particular ascetic claimed that his prodemocracy activities in Bhutan had forced him to seek political asylum in India; he seems to have been an ascetic by necessity rather than by choice.

35. The owner advertised a forty thousand rupee guarantee that his goods were genuine, and he would have had to pay this had this fraud been discovered.

36. Sudhir Kakar describes this dynamic in the healing work of the Radha Soami Satsang, which he characterizes as based on idealization of and identification with Maharajji, the Radha Soami guru (1982: 145). For this to succeed, negative impressions of Maharajji need to be denied access to consciousness, which means that followers reinforce this idealized image with each other. He further notes that even though identification and idealization occur in every therapeutic setting, they are temporary expedients in psychotherapy but permanent in the Radha Soami Satsang.

37. Judith Adler specifically discusses this notion with regard to the Christian Desert Fathers, but it can be more broadly applied to any charismatic religious authority. Amarnath consistently stressed that genuine teachers did not make disciples; disciples made themselves. This idea's deep roots are clear from the biography of the seventeenth-century saint Dadu Dayal, who remarks: "I do not make disciples, people come on their own . . . like the lotus recognizing the moon or the snake smelling the sandaltree" (Callewaert 1988: 65). This notion of people being drawn by a saint's holy power is also found throughout Sufi literature—here, too, the power ultimately comes from God, and the saintly person is only the conduit for it.

38. In 1998, Pilot Baba sponsored a publicity event in which a Japanese *sadhvi* named Mata Kela Devi demonstrated her yogic powers by being buried in an underground chamber for seventy-two hours. She was unearthed on 27 March, the day before the second major bathing day—timing that seemed calculated to gain maximum exposure (*Amar Ujala* 25 March 1998).

39. Asa Ram Bapu's camp was massive—a four-day yoga program on 26–30 March 1998 was advertised as being able to seat 150,000 people, sleep 50,000, feed 40,000 to 50,000 people every day, and to have 7,000 latrines and bathrooms (*Amar Ujala* 27 March 1998).

40. Both yoga and Indian spirituality are highly marketable export commodities, as a quick look through magazines such as *Yoga Journal* clearly shows. They have also been used as tourist attractions, as in Rishikesh's annual yoga festival, which targets an international audience.

41. Amarnath described helping a foreigner who had been left penniless in Badrinath after quarreling with her ascetic guru; the story's moral was that economic dependence paved the way for all sorts of unpleasantness.

42. Making money off holy men is hardly unique to India. Adler (2002: 32) notes that an enterprising deacon built a successful business leading pilgrim tour groups to St. Anthony's desert hermitage.

43. One problem was a "bad" son who refused to vacate a family-owned apartment. On Amarnath's advice, the father sold the property from underneath him, and at Amarnath's request, the property dealer took no commission from the sale. Another problem was a daughter who had finished her BA but was at home because of difficulty in arranging her marriage. Amarnath advised further education—both to get her out of the house and to enhance her stock in the marriage market. Her marriage was fixed soon after she finished her MA, and the money for the wedding came from the sale of the apartment.

44. Although Kakar's Freudian bent probably leads him to privilege parental relationships, I am intrigued by his speculation that "a well-developed model of parental styles might contribute to an understanding of the puzzling phenomenon of guru selection; namely, why one guru leaves a seeker quite cold while another arouses such intense emotions" (1982: 213).

45. Williams (1986) and White (1980) both clearly show that a guru's role goes well beyond the normal perception of a spiritual adviser; Amarnath's interactions with his disciples also clearly fit this pattern.

46. For instance, in May 1990, a man and his grown son came from Meerut to meet Amarnath, who clearly had never met them before. He put them at ease with small talk and then asked general questions ("Are your affairs going all right?") to elicit why they had come. It turned out that their worries were mainly financial: a reduced income caused by the father's recent retirement and his concern for an unemployed son. Amarnath advised them to start some kind of business, revealing enough about his own past to prove that this was sound advice, yet he also cautioned them that they would have to do this themselves. His discourse then moved from economic self-reliance to spiritual self-reliance, and he used stories and illustrations that by then were familiar to me.

47. One friend told me that whenever a family member speculated that an ascetic they had known must have died, the ascetic would appear in a dream to tell them that he would be coming back again.

48. The most dramatic story recounted how after nine days of fasting—because he had no money and refused to beg—a wealthy man appeared and asked Amarnath to perform a ritual for him. When Amarnath asked how the man had found him, the man hesitantly replied that a heavenly voice had announced that a light would lead him to the person who could help him, and that he had followed the light ten kilometers before he found Amarnath.

49. His 1986 prediction that my wife and I would soon have a son—culturally desirable for Indian newlyweds but catastrophic for an American graduate student—was unexpectedly fulfilled in 1997.

50. In the same way, the healings and miracles attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were also seen as visible proofs of his power.

51. When the problem is with the husband, ascetics may give more mundane "blessings." Gross describes a Punjab shrine where ascetics have ritual intercourse

with barren women (1992: 372); the same motif appears in "The Barren Woman of Balramgaon," a story by Mark Tully (1995). Both draw on popular ideas of *sadhu* potency gained through celibacy and renunciation.

52. The guru's authority is reinforced by a traditional symbol, the *gaddi* ("throne," but often just a seat), which gives a raised platform from which to speak down to one's hearers. This is usually in a central spot and almost invariably commands the space's central axes.

53. Mestrovic (1986: 437), citing K. Singh's *Indian Society and Social Institutions*. These stressors are confirmed by Indian suicide statistics, which are the highest for the twenty to thirty age group and higher for married women than for singles (Khan 2002: 105).

54. Mestrovic (1986: 439, 438) notes that clear signs of mental illness are antisocial behaviors such as "quarreling, abusive behavior, self-neglect, alcoholism, smoking cannabis, or disobedience to traditional authority figures." Men more commonly suffer from substance abuse, whereas women exhibit "'Hysterical-Conversion Reactions,' in which they say they are possessed and give 'tall orders about the house.'" Kakar (1982: 75–81) also remarks on joint family pressures as a source of stress and its differing manifestations in women and men; both suggest that women's behaviors are clear reactions against their subordination.

55. For one example, see Kakar's description of exorcisms at the Hanuman temple at Mehndipur (1982: 53–88).

56. Although therapists have more formal training (as well as certification), ascetics go through an informal selection process: those who can successfully help people become better known, which brings more people coming to them for help.

57. Mestrovic (1986: 441), quoting an unattributed phrase from Thomas Szasz.

58. Khandelwal and colleagues also mention the use of plant products and minerals as partially effective; other methods include "long-term isolation of patients, patient restraint, ritual beating and ritual bathing" (2004: 138). Their major criticism is that since many healers believe mental illness is caused by past karma, they may dissuade families from seeking formal treatment.

59. In discussing the Swami Narayan movement, Williams observes negligible transference between guru and disciple, since they have only brief contact. According to Williams, the guru's word primarily functions to ease people's anxieties, since devotees believe they are getting messages from God (1986: 337).

60. Kakar (1982: 146). Kakar never addresses the reality that many patients become just as dependent on their therapists as the *satsangi*s on their guru.

61. McKean (1996: 19) discusses how joining the Swaminarayan movement connects one into a business and social network—which is offset by the cost of active membership, which can range between 5 and 10 percent of one's income.

62. Among Vigne's criticisms are the assumptions that that one can be cured in a short time, that formal study can make one an effective judge of human nature, that payment is a necessary condition for treatment, and that the patient and teacher should remain completely separate and uninvolved.

63. For another perspective on Satpal Maharaj and his ashram, see McKean (1996: 53–57).

CHAPTER 7

1. The *Tirthayatraparvan* in the *Mahabharata* commends pilgrimage as a less expensive alternative to sacrifice and eventually claims that pilgrimage generates even greater religious merit (*punya*). These texts also routinely describe the merit generated by pilgrimage rituals with reference to the merit generated by Vedic sacrifices, particularly the horse sacrifice (*ashvamedha*).

2. Van der Veer (1989: 63) observes that this is a theological rather than an anthropological argument, that it draws ideas from widely differing times and places, and that it ignores "the production and management of meaning by various interest groups involved in the pilgrimage."

3. These writers largely address European Christian pilgrimage, and one of their key assumptions is a postmodern context, in which traditional authorities (e.g., the Catholic Church) have largely lost their power to dictate the meaning of symbols, which now depend more on individual interpretation. One can rightly question whether such unanimity ever existed in fact—Swatos notes that sixteenth-century Saint Paul's Cathedral was rife with "secular" activity, including lawyers, merchants, and various tradesmen (2002: 93)—but since Hindu India has never had any comparable centralized religious hierarchy, one can expect to find an even wider divergence about what pilgrimage "means."

4. This impression may simply reflect this text's particular focus, since a later work critiques "Said's notion that colonialism and orientalism created the reality in which Indians had to live" on the ground that this "denies Indians agency in constructing their society" (1998: 21).

5. Gold's village focus lets her detail how pilgrim journeys fit into their daily lives, but it also has certain blind spots. Among these is the assumption that villagers are somehow more genuinely Hindu than city dwellers. This comes through in her disdain for the "bourgeois pilgrims—women in nylon saris and men in western clothes" who had come to view the Ganga *arati* at Hardwar, or the assertion that her village companions on the bus tour were the "real pilgrims" (1989: 208, 277).

6. For example, trips to Hardwar are included in both "fulfillment of bio-moral duty" and "wandering," and some of the pilgrims on the "wandering" tour performed funereal rites at Gaya (which means that they were fulfilling bio-moral duty). In fairness, she seems to recognize that these distinctions overlap, as in her reference to people visiting curing shrines not for healing, but to maintain a relationship with the deity, and to request general ends such as "happiness and peace" (1988: 145).

7. Saraswati (1983: 34) describes how a potter, a brahmin, and a *sanyasi* would perform very different religious actions as pilgrims in Benares.

8. The most common warning is to watch one's property. The signs either warn visitors about potential dangers or prescribe appropriate pilgrim behavior. Both sorts of messages have been remarkably constant; in 1922, a Jain pilgrimage manual began

with injunctions for appropriate behavior and then gave advice how to prevent from being robbed and cheated (Gevi Lal 1922: 8–16).

9. The clearest examples are the “Bengali season” during Durga Puja and the “Gujarati” season at Diwali. Bhardwaj (1973: 219–20) notes that there are good reasons for these regional surges. Schools and businesses usually close for important festivals, allowing family vacations, whereas farming groups come during the slack times in the agricultural calendar.

10. Amarnath had lent him 200 rupees to send a telegram to his “office” and to tide him over until his money arrived. The man repaid 100 rupees after about a week, but a few days later, he requested another 1,200 rupees to book his taxi to Badrinath, assuring Amarnath that he would repay it when Amarnath arrived there. Amarnath refused and later remarked that the original repayment was like baiting a hook—giving up something to gain something larger.

11. As noted in chapter 2, the HDM describes Shiva as revealing himself not to Parvati, but to an ascetic’s daughter named Bilvaka. Still, both traditions describe the *linga* as self-manifested.

12. As with all sacred sites, Bilvakeshvar draws larger crowds on particularly auspicious days such as Mondays (Shiva’s day of the week), festivals such as Shivaratri or a Somavati Amavasya (new moon on Monday), and during the lunar month of Shravan, a time specially marked by vows to Shiva.

13. The temple is not mentioned in Dvivedi’s *Haridvaramahatmya* (1927), which minutely describes Hardwar’s sacred sites. A contemporary newspaper account claims that the temple and the image were originally at Siyalkoti in the Shiwaliks but that in 1927 a “Siddha Baba” installed the image in Hardwar and gave it to a *panda* family (*The Hindu*: 1997). This story concedes a twentieth-century origin, but I doubt that it is true, since it doesn’t explain how the Niranjani Akhara came to manage the temple. Mansa Devi’s printed *mahatmya* has no strong charter myth for the site and only alludes to goddesses “worshipped from times immemorial” (Bharati 1988: 28).

14. Festivals such as the Kumbha Melas are important venues for establishing such relationships, since one reason that people attend such festivals is to meet the “saints.” Another important way to establish such relationships is recommendation through personal networks. Once such relationships are established, many devotees will visit regularly.

15. One Hardwar friend had this sort of relationship with Vaishno Devi. He first went to ask her for a job so that he could get married and then returned twice to give thanks: the first time after getting a job and the second with his wife after the marriage.

16. In October 2005, I encountered a *panda* drawing an elaborate diagram near Har-ki-Pairi; he told me that it would be used for the three parts of the sacred thread ceremony. When I noted that these had stretched over three days for my landlord’s son, he replied that Har-ki-Pairi was so holy that the rites could all be done at once. This answer is consistent with the tradition, but another possible explanation is the cost: a one-day ceremony at Har-ki-Pairi would probably cost far less than a three-day extravaganza.

17. Kane (HOD 2.260) cites a number of sources giving precedence to family custom in setting the time for this rite, so here popular culture preserves a classical pattern.

18. Many purification rites include tonsure because Hindus believe that hair traps impurity. Since Indian babies are often born with hair, the tonsure removes the last residual pollution from birth.

19. For full descriptions of this rite, see Kane (HOD 2.268–330) or Pandey (1949: 187–240). The rite's proper name is *upanayana* ("bringing near"), but it is usually called *janeu*, after the name for the sacred thread itself.

20. My "nephew" Himanshu had his sacred thread ceremony at sixteen—clearly contravening Manu's prescription (3.36) that brahmin boys should have it in their eighth year. Himanshu's three-day thread ceremony "bundled" half a dozen *samskara*s and ended with the *samavartana* ceremony marking the student's return home at the conclusion of his study. Thus the ceremony fulfilled all the life-cycle rites required by tradition but in a highly compressed fashion.

21. Aside from playing music, the band served as a vessel (*patra*) to transfer inauspiciousness from the mother and child. During the procession, relatives would wave money in a circle over the mother and child and then give the money to the musicians. Raheja (1988: 87–88) describes this motion (*war-pher*) as loosening any inauspiciousness attached to the person, which attaches to the circling object (in this case, money) and is transferred to the recipient.

22. According to the *mahatmya*—displayed in 1990 on a painted sign, although this was gone in 2005—Kushavarta's holiness increases the merit from any action ten million times.

23. See chapter 2.

24. Ann Gold (1989: 85–88, 202–13) describes such a trip to Hardwar immediately after death, and my conversations with visitors lead me to believe that this is fairly common.

25. As noted in chapter 3, the Upper Ganges Canal's engineering works have ensured a steady flow at Har-ki-Pairi, regardless of the season.

26. For overviews of ritual purity and impurity, see Fuller (2004: 12–16) and Babb (1975: 47–51).

27. When I mentioned the Ganga's purity to Baba Haridas, he wrote "Ganges—Snow—Very Pure" on his slate but then added that this was no longer true.

28. Nathji (n.d., 28). The pamphlet claimed that this curative power depended on the strength of one's faith in the Ganges, and so any failure could be blamed on lack of faith.

29. As noted in chapter 4, innkeepers pay close attention to the festival calendar and adjust their prices according to the anticipated demand.

30. Hardwar and Prayag also have "half" (*Ardha*) Kumbha Melas six years after the full Kumbha Melas. Both Hardwar Melas climax when the sun enters Aries, but the other condition is the position of Jupiter—in Aquarius (*kumbha*) for the full Kumbha Mela, and in Leo for the half Kumbha Mela.

31. One attraction at a full Mela is the opportunity to meet ascetics who have come to bathe there. During Hardwar's half Mela, these ascetics are all at the Ujjain Kumbha Mela—and this overlap is only one piece of evidence that the current Mela schedule is relatively recent.

32. The desire to bathe at the most propitious time has often brought tragedy: there have been accidental deaths at Hardwar in 1820, 1879, 1915, 1927, and most recently in 1986.

33. In Indian mythology, eclipses are caused by the inauspicious "planet" Rahu, the severed but immortal head of a demon. Rahu occasionally swallows the sun and the moon, causing the eclipse, but they eventually emerge from his severed throat. This association makes eclipses an inauspicious time when people take all sorts of precautions. The most extreme concern comes for pregnant women, who must remain inside and lie completely still, lest the child have missing digits.

34. He said that his guru did this to rid him of the notion that he was an important man; he was also forbidden to ask for anything during his journey to Hardwar, in order to teach him that God would provide for him.

35. Perhaps the most remarkable thing was that his guru had passed away in 1982, and yet his presence and instructions were strong enough for Sharma to follow them eight years later.

36. The word *pradosh* is glossed as "evening," and those keeping this vow should fast all day, worship Shiva in the early evening, and then eat their only meal of the day. A contemporary pamphlet on the Shravana Mahatmya (Caturvedi n.d., B: 11), lists vows and fasts for every day in Shravan; other sources list Shravan's Mondays as particularly auspicious for Shiva worship (Tripathi 1978: 114–15; H. Singh n.d.: 62–63; Bahan and Bahan n.d.: 43–44).

37. Sixteenth-century references to *kanvar*s can be found in Jayasi's *Padmavat* (1963: 362.7–8) and Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* (1986: 1.300.4). Parkes (1850: 1.260), Peggs (1832: 126), Roberts (1845: 101), and Sardesai (1931: 18.74) all mention people using *kanvar*s to transport Ganges water; the last records *kanvar*s of Ganges water from Hardwar arriving at the Peshwa court in 1758.

38. One pamphlet (Raj 1989: 10–11) claims that the vow to carry a *kanvar* and offer Ganges water is so powerful that this vow impels Shiva to grant the person's wish.

39. By and large, these pilgrims came from lower economic classes and were either village dwellers or recent urban migrants—that is, people for whom these major goals would be more difficult to attain. Fuller (2004: 217–18) notes a similar class composition at Shabari Malai, another strenuous male-dominated ritual.

40. These two versions are in Upadhyay (1990: 7–12), and Raj (1989: 7–8); this story is also the charter for the Mauritius pilgrimage (Cascaro and Zimmerman 1987: 224).

41. This fluidity can be seen by the rite's multiple variants, such as pilgrims' differing attitudes toward purity, taking gifts, and their differing destinations.

42. The influence is clearest for the Mauritius pilgrimage, since the Indians who settled there came from Bihar. Tarakeshvar's case is less transparent. Morinis (1984: 93–94, 98) suggests that the temple's *mahant* began a Shravan *kanvar* festival between 1912 and 1925 in an effort to gain Marwari patronage, and Vaidyanath's fame and regional influence make it an appropriate model for this.

43. This final episode first appears in Mitra's "On the Temples of Deoghar" (1883: 168). Prabhakar and Rajalaksmi's recording (1990) shows that it is still current.

44. The term *char dham* also refers to Puri, Rameshvaram, Dwaraka, and Badrinath—four pilgrimage sites that roughly demarcate the subcontinent. The Himalayan "abodes" can be seen as this group "in miniature," and thus visiting them is a symbolic circumambulation of India.

45. *Chatti*s (from *chat*, "roof") were basic shelters that were usually run as a family business. The managers sold pilgrims staple foods and lent them cooking utensils, so that pilgrims had to carry only their personal effects. With better roads. this network has disappeared, although some of these places remain important staging-grounds (e.g., Rampur and Sitapur, at which Kedarnath pilgrims often make a night halt).

46. Amarnath told me that a round trip from Hardwar to Kedarnath and Badrinath would take about three months, whereas the entire *char dham* pilgrimage would take almost six months.

47. In fact, the only time spent away from the group was our treks to Yamunotri and Kedarnath, and by the journey's end, I had a real sense of most of these people, quirks and all.

48. Poorer pilgrims would make their own arrangements—the Nigam offered a bus transportation package for 600 rupees—whereas wealthier people would have traveled on the taxi tour (3,000 rupees) or by private car. By comparison, the cost for a seat on a bus tour had risen to 8,660 rupees during the 2006 season, and a seat on a taxi tour to 11,180 rupees.

49. One clear status indicator is that many of our companions spoke good English.

50. Complaining was sometimes a strategy to get what they wanted, but some people were plainly unprepared for the trip's "hardships"—simple food, no hot water, and basic lodging.

51. Yamunotri was so unimpressive that I have never returned there, whereas I have gone back to the other sites in 2002, 2005, 2006, and 2009—and plan to return again.

52. Since 1990, Gangotri has grown uncontrollably—in 2002, it seemed ten times larger than in 1990—and this sudden growth has caused all sorts of environmental problems.

53. Uniyal (1982: 207). He also notes that an earlier temple was built in the early 1800s, by the Gurkha ruler Amar Singh Thapa.

54. These prices have all risen over time: in 2005, the listed *puja*s ran from 101 rupees to 2,100 rupees. One measure of the Gangotri temple committee's sophistication was that in 1990 it was the only site displaying printed flyers that pilgrims could take away with them and use to commission rites by mail; by 2002, Kedarnath and Badrinath had done this, too.

55. I am skeptical about calling it possession, since there are other ways of interpreting this behavior, but I can safely say that I have never seen anything like it before or since.

56. While performing *pindadan*, one of our companions began to tell me the Ganga's charter myth, in which caring for one's ancestors is an integral theme. When he got stuck, he consigned me to a nearby *panda*, who skillfully connected the myth

with local sites—that Bhagirath had done his *tapas* on the very rock on which he was sitting and that pilgrims were doing *pindadan* on the exact spot where Bhagirath's 60,000 ancestors had been killed. Bhagirath's rock is one example of Gangotri's success in generating patronage—in 1990, it was covered by a rickety wooden gazebo, and in 2002, by an elaborate marble canopy.

57. People still die from fatigue, exposure, or disease—a companion party in 1990 had someone die at Gangotri—but the most serious danger is road accidents. The roads are narrow and dangerous, and too many people drive fast and carelessly.

58. In visits since 2002, parts of the exterior have been painted in bright colors, which is common for temples in that part of the Himalayas.

59. The Badrinath road was built for military reasons after the 1962 Indo-Chinese war, but even before that, Badrinath was the best developed site. It not only has the region's wealthiest temple but was also on one of the trade routes leading to Tibet and thus had more business pass through it than the other sites.

60. These restrictions on foreigners have now ended, and I visited these sites in June 2006.

CHAPTER 8

1. He was the only person to reply to a letter that I sent after the trip was over, asking for people's impressions. His reply was clearly drawn from the pamphlets I had seen him buying along the way and, for the most part, reiterated the charter myths for these places.

2. In the turmoil of our initial departure, he remarked that we should not be complaining at the start, but taking God's name, and despite getting soaked in the mishap at Yamunotri, he apologized to the bus driver, rightly noting that people were angry because of the circumstances.

3. This answer could have been intended to deflect my question, but since this man had been honest and outspoken throughout the trip, I think this unlikely.

4. A briefer form of this literature survey was published in Bhardwaj and Lochtefeld 2004: 486–88.

5. While descending from Kedarnath in 1986, one man informed me that real pilgrimage had to be done on foot, and without shoes. Even if people are unaware of the austere standards in the pilgrimage manuals, they have a concrete example in wandering ascetics, who really do travel on foot and endure all sorts of privations.

6. He got visibly embarrassed when I asked him about it and said that it was for his brother.

7. For an example of such rationalization in an American context, see Narayanan (1992: 174).

8. The original version of this story appears in Mulchand (1904: 83–106); modern versions are in Nathji (n.d.: 19–22), Randhir Singh (n.d.: 39–44), and other pamphlets from Randhir Publishing.

9. Despite the distance between them, Hardwar and Bikaner have long-standing connections, probably because of the northwest trade route. Inscriptions show that

Bikareri donors endowed buildings throughout Hardwar, the Sharvan Nath temple inscription mentions the Bikaner king as present at the temple's dedication in 1820, and a donor from Bikaner built the adjoining Ganges temple in 1830.

10. Many of the themes in this section are drawn from "Tirthas and Tourism: From Bliss to Babylon?" an unpublished paper delivered in 1998 at the AAR/SBL annual meeting. They were also published in greatly abbreviated form in Bhardwaj and Lochtefeld (2004: 494–95).

11. Varma (1998) highlights these themes in his final chapter, "The Writing on the Wall."

12. Their huge numbers make the "Great Indian Middle Class" India's most significant tourist market, but there are also other niche markets, such as foreign tourists. One example of the latter is Rajasthan Tourism's Palace on Wheels, for which 93 percent of the passengers have been foreigners (*Times of India*, 18 April 1998: 4). A more insidious example is Rishikesh's Swargashram area, which draws foreigners seeking what one friend called "California tantra"—spiritual practice in a luxury setting, combined with further attractions such as yoga or music lessons.

13. One clear recent example is Uttaranchal (now Uttarakhand) Tourism's "Vir Chandra Singh Garwhali Tourism Self-Employment Initiative," which brokers loans to set up small businesses and is particularly targeted toward unemployed youths.

14. Pandey noted that shorter visits were actually detrimental to the site, since short-term visitors tended to bring everything with them from home—providing no benefits to the local economy but adding to the environmental carrying costs (interview 19 April 1998).

15. Bhardwaj shows a family planning exhibit set up at the 1968 Ardha Kumbha Mela (1973: 215). The fixed exhibits at the 1998 Kumbha Mela included improved farming techniques and pest control, whereas street theater troupes enacted skits promoting topics such as AIDS awareness and women's education.

16. The government is not simply following the market to its lowest level but is also promoting laudable goals such as ecotourism, which includes not only environmental awareness but also cultural sensitivity—avoiding revealing clothing, respecting holy places and local culture, and not leaving graffiti (from "Mahakumbh Hardwar" and "Pilgrimage to Uttarakhand").

17. Sadhana Jaitley, private conversation, 7 July 1996.

18. This was evident as early as 1989, when a visitor told me that in earlier times, the lack of other options made it necessary to stay with one's *panda*, but now one could stay in greater comfort at a hotel. Another sign of the *panda*s' poor adjustment to the new economy can be seen in Kushavarta Ghat, one of the places where *panda*s meet their clients. Even though Kushavarta is a prime location close to Har-ki-Pairi, it remains largely undeveloped, because the properties' multiple owners lack the unity and the capital to develop them.

19. The call girl allegation comes from *Amar Ujala*, 5 January 1998: 11, which also alleged that hotels served nonvegetarian food. An article two weeks later again raised this latter allegation, after which the authorities publicly emphasized that this was prohibited in Hardwar (*Amar Ujala*, 23 January 1998: 13).

20. I am grateful to Daniel Noffke, one of my students at Carthage in spring 2008, for bringing Gangadham to my attention. Web search engines failed to turn up a Web site for Gangadham, but one of the news stories about it is at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4494747.stm.

21. One of these camps was a local operation and cost 750 rupees daily; the other listed offices only in Delhi and Bombay and was clearly aiming for a more upscale market. Even though both were only seven kilometers from Hardwar, the Mela Authority's strict restrictions on vehicle traffic made their "proximity" a cruel joke.

22. The temple is plainly visible from just north of Har-ki-Pairi, and I am convinced that its height was meant to draw people to a less trafficked region.

23. Many of the general ideas in this section have previously been published in Lochtefeld 1994 and 1996.

24. The most potent evidence for this claim was the 1986 Shah Bano case, in which a divorced Muslim woman petitioned a court for financial support from her ex-husband, to whom she had been married for fifty-three years. The court granted this, but the decision was opposed by Muslim leaders as contrary to Muslim personal law. In a bid to win Muslim electoral support—Muslims comprise only about 12 percent of the population but are concentrated in certain districts—Rajiv Gandhi's Congress government overturned this ruling and, with it, any commitment to the rule of law.

25. The BJP stressed Hindutva until 1996, when it received about a third of the total votes and was the largest single party, but unable to form a government because no other party would support it. The BJP's leaders accepted that the "Hindu" vote would never produce an outright majority, changed their tactics to focus on governance, and built coalitions with regional parties.

26. Temple proponents claim that the Babri Masjid ("Babur's Mosque") was built after razing the temple standing on the Hindu god Rama's actual birthplace. It is quite possible that the mosque was built on the ruins of a temple or that a temple was razed to build the mosque; here historians disagree. The claim that this site is Rama's birthplace is less verifiable historically.

27. For example, in 1998, the Juna *akhara* firmly supported the BJP and was able to draw on that patronage, which meant that the other *akhara*s sought support from other political parties.

28. For example, a demonstration at Ayodhya in 1990 was scheduled to coincide with an annual pilgrimage in which hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit the city. Similar events were scheduled in Mathura on Krishna Janmashtami and in Benares on Shivaratri (in both cases, in 1995). Each of these places has a disputed site on which a mosque is claimed to have replaced a temple.

29. This first campaign was spurred by the much-publicized conversion of Harijans to Islam in the village of Meenakshipuram, Tamil Nadu; one factor spurring this was caste discrimination.

30. The processions and brick worship happened in fall 1989; the *jalabhisek* in February 1995. For a more detailed picture of Hindu nationalism, see McKean (1996) and Jaffrelot (1996).

31. His assessment fits this pilgrimage as a mass-based rite, although Reynolds (1932: 316–17) and Meerut district gazetteers (Atkinson 1876: 310; Joshi 1965: 357) hint at an earlier practice.

32. The Hindi newspaper *Amar Ujala* ran a photo and caption of the model on 13 August 1996: 12.

33. Mahmud of Ghazni razed Somnath in 1024, and Babar's general Mir Baqi erected the Babri Masjid in 1528, after allegedly destroying the original Ram Janam Bhumi temple. Somnath was rebuilt after independence, and building the Ram Janam Bhumi temple is a future goal.

34. While walking with *kanvar* pilgrims in 1996, I saw several instances of such tension—mainly manifested by shouting slogans of one sort or another.

35. Newspaper accounts from 1996 reported various incidents, which are mentioned here as representative of the forces that so much testosterone can potentially unleash. Hardwar shopkeepers closed down the market when the situation got too strained (*Amar Ujala* 8 August 1996: 8), and on the road there was one riot when a pilgrim's bag was stolen (*Amar Ujala* 8 August 1996: 12) and another when a banner was set on fire (*Amar Ujala* 11 August 1996: 14). Given pilgrim numbers and density, it is surprising that such events are not more frequent.

36. *Amar Ujala* (13 August 1996: 1) claimed that 1.2 million pilgrims made offerings at Pura Mahadev on the final day but later noted that the busiest times saw fifty pilgrims per minute. At this rate, the largest possible crowd for the eighteen-hour celebration was "only" 54,000.

37. Fuller's discussion (2004: 266–68) of Chennai's Vinayaka Chaturthi festival shows a similar "contested discourse," with Hindu nationalist groups claiming the festival crowds as their supporters, whereas many participants reported being there for other reasons and being opposed to these groups.

38. Uttarkashi's plight is described in *Dainik Jagaran*, Samayika, 15 April 1998: 1, and Gangotri's predicament in Pradhan (1998: 46). Another concrete change has been diminished ritual concern about my status as a foreigner and presumably non-Hindu. In 1990, the Yamunotri *panda*s were the only ones to solicit me to perform *puja*, but in 2002 and 2005, this was commonplace at Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath, too. For the economically stressed *panda*s at these highly seasonal pilgrimage sites, foreigners are an untapped and potentially lucrative market.

39. Om Prakash Sharma, *tirtha purohit,* conversation 17 July 1990; anonymous Meerut farmer, conversation 10 October 1989.

40. Uniyal (1982: 223) shares similar thoughts about the Himalayas and charges that economic development has come at the cost of their heritage. He favors developing nonreligious tourist places but asserts that to retain their purity, *tirtha*s must be kept undeveloped—including no roads.

41. One demonstrable effect on Hardwar has been its development as an urban and educational center, whereas in the past it was only a bathing place and a home for ascetics.

42. Raper noted that most pilgrims would bring goods from their native regions to the fair with them, since in that vast market, they could be certain to sell them at a profit (1979: 450–51).

43. These following paragraphs incorporate ideas first discussed in Lochtefeld 1998.

44. Bhardwaj and Lochtefeld (2004: 493); these quotes from Kane were part of the original draft written by Bhardwaj.

45. One common exhortation is the need to keep things pure (see Appendix II), and a 1990 sign at the Kangra *mandir* warned that strewing garbage there would generate bad karma. Posted guidelines at Pushkar in 2005 evinced similar concerns for purity.

46. Ann Gold (1989: 289) translates *kathauti* as “kneading-platter,” and my dictionaries gloss it as a small wooden trough or tub. It is entirely possible that Amarnath identified it as the cobbler’s water pot to heighten his point.

47. One of our Himalayan companions bathed everywhere that we stopped, but after a while his wife told us that he was not particularly pious, he just liked cold baths!

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